



The Holy See

*DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AI PRESIDENTI DEI PARLAMENTI EUROPEI**

Sabato, 26 novembre 1983

1. The Conference of the Presidents of the parliaments of the member States of the European Community and Parliament is an institution still in its youth, and this second meeting in Rome, after that held in Luxembourg, has given you the opportunity to come to the Vatican as well. I am touched that you yourselves expressed the desire of having this audience and I thank you for your visit and for the noble words your interpreter, president Cossiga, has just spoken before us.

In the framework of the spiritual role which is essentially that of the Holy See, I would have no reason to treat of the technical means of developing cooperation between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments, which was the subject of your meeting. However, the proper exercise of legislative power in each of your countries and the judicious development of the unity of Europe, or at least, in what concerns you, of the Community, is of the keenest interest to the Holy See, because what is involved here is the right conduct of social life, the advance of justice and of solidarity among the people of this continent, and thus also their proper moral progress and their relationship to the rest of Europe and of the world community. The Church is far from being an outsider to the balanced development of political institutions; the Holy See is moreover represented in each of your countries, and at the European Communities by an Apostolic Nuncio.

2. First of all, I express good wishes for you as presidents and Secretaries General of the national Parliaments of the ten countries represented here. With variants that stem from their history, these countries in general have a two chamber parliament, with a mandate from the sovereign people, for the exercise of the legislative power. These serve to complement and control one another so that the common good of all your compatriots may be guaranteed by laws characterized by a maximum of wisdom, Prudence, and justice. As I said recently to some European

parliamentarians, such a democracy, properly understood, with a sufficiently strong public authority, is a great opportunity, if one compares it to regimes founded on violence, on dictatorship or on the privileges of an all powerful oligarchy. Yes, in this sense, true democracy must be defended with tenacity. And you who personally preside at the functioning of the Parliamentary Assemblies, with everything this implies in terms of respect for the law and the institutions, impartiality toward the various political groups, respectful reception of persons called to express themselves in the Assembly, in short, with respect for equity and authority, you fulfil a worthy charge, a qualified service to your nations, for which I express to you my esteem, my good wishes and my support.

3. But the problem from now on will be to harmonize the legislative work and the authority of your national parliaments, on the one hand, with the activity of the European Parliament, on the other. I would almost dare to say that you are still in the running-in stage. A running-in stage that is difficult in more than one respect! For on the juridical level the European parliament, even though it is elected by universal suffrage and thus receives power directly there from, has only limited authority which must accord with the decisions of the member States. In any case, these European nations have each, not only private interests, but also a long and rich personal history, a special patrimony, which cannot be levelled down, but rather respected and coordinated. Nevertheless the progress of the European Community, its unity and its strength, require that effective powers be gradually and in a reasonable manner transferred or assigned to the European Parliament, in order that the latter may fulfil its role of service to all and assure the common good of the member countries. Such a structure requires flexibility and prudence, aimed at combining a respect for the local forums and the will to achieve a higher harmony. It is this delicate coordination that you are seeking to accomplish or to prepare; this will be your merit, in the eyes of history, to have brought this difficult work to a successful realization with the maximum equilibrium.

4. Above and beyond the practical functioning of your institutions, I would pause briefly to comment on the object of their activity. The common measures which are adopted at the level of the Community obviously bear on the economy, commercial exchanges, agricultural, mineral and industrial production, regional situations, cultural accomplishments. They affect also the social life of the workers, whether native or immigrant, family life, education and thus the conditions of the moral life. Practically speaking, today, you encounter analogous problems from one country to another, regarding, for example, the youth. In the free debates, the discussions or the votes in these important questions you are not simply to reflect the mores or the common opinions of your constituencies, and still less to impose arbitrary decisions in their regard, nor even to follow necessarily and always the line of a party, but-I would venture to say-you are to refer, to submit to the values that are fundamental to life in society and 'to its authentic progress, to seek in conscience the true good, according to well-established ethical convictions and an acute sense of responsibility, I would say, for all the consequences of your decisions. I short, what is at issue is to know what quality of society one is promoting.

The Europe you represent corresponds to countries of long Christian tradition. One might even say that for the most part their national history to date is almost indistinguishable from Christian history itself. How cannot one but hope that Europe will offer in this respect a special witness, at all levels, including that of democracy of which I was just speaking? Democracy is not aimed at an egalitarianism which levels everything, rather its goal is respect for persons, for their fundamental rights, and their liberty, while remaining attentive to the primary role of families and of intermediary bodies, and likewise taking care to transcend private interests when the common good is at stake. One could speak in this regard of a parliamentary ethic.

5. I just mentioned the "common good": that of your countries and that of Europe, certainly, but also that of the international community. This latter expects from the European Community a witness of justice and of brotherhood, an original and effective contribution to the ending of wars now in progress, to the search for equitable negotiated solutions, to the banning of violence, of terrorism, of torture, and I would say even more, of the summary executions perpetrated even by legitimate governments, to progressive and controlled disarmament, to the improvement of the terms of exchange between rich and poor countries, to effective support for the relief of hunger and for the development of peoples starting from their own resources.

Despite the acuteness of her own weaknesses, Europe is capable of making this contribution. She should do so. For not only does she still have substantial means at her disposal, but also her children have had so many opportunities of learning what is just and good, of forming their minds and their hearts, of experiencing the value of life and of liberty, of drawing at the sources of love which Christianity has revealed to them! Yes, the nations of the world have a right to expect special support from her.

I pray God to inspire you and to sustain you in your high charge. And I commend to him the future of yourselves, your families, your fatherlands, of Europe, of the whole of Europe.

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