



# The Holy See

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## PELLEGRINAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN FRANCIA

### ***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II ALL'ASSEMBLEA PARLAMENTARE DEL CONSIGLIO EUROPEO\****

*Strasburgo (Francia) - Sabato, 8 ottobre 1988* 1. I am happy to be able to visit today the Council of Europe and to address the Parliamentary Assembly at Strasbourg, a city whose history attests to the European vocation. I warmly thank the President, Mr. Louis Jung, for the words he has just spoken, and I am grateful to him, as well as to Mr. Marcelino Oreja, the Secretary General, for having desired to renew the invitation which they extended to me several years ago. Thus you afford me the opportunity to express once more the Catholic Church's esteem for an institution whose activity she follows closely through a permanent Mission. Your Council has the beautiful and great vocation of drawing the nations of this continent together to strengthen "peace founded on justice" for the preservation of the human society and civilization" in an unwavering attachment "to the spiritual and moral values which are the common patrimony of her peoples", to quote but a few of the essential expressions of the preamble of your statutes. Next Year the Council of Europe celebrates the fortieth anniversary of its foundation. This will be the occasion for your Assembly, representatives of the democratic authorities of twenty-one countries, to take an account of the great amount of work done to respond to the hopes of the peoples, to serve an ideal of freedom, tolerance and respect for right.

2. Following the second world war, begun in Europe, the need was deeply felt once again to overcome the antagonisms among peoples which had just been opposed. The will was expressed to bring yesterday's opponents into solidarity with one another and to institutionalize their cooperation. I cannot forget that, in the midst of the torments, the voice of Pope Pius XII was raised to proclaim the "inviolable dignity of the human person", "the true freedom of man" (cf. Radio message for Christmas 1944). It is fitting to pay homage to these clear-sighted people who were able to gather beyond their frontiers, and overcome ancient enmities to propose and to succeed in the prospect of this Council convened to become a place where Europe is conscious of itself, where it takes measure of the tasks which it must accomplish in response to the anguish and hopes of its citizens, where it undertakes the cooperation necessary in many and arduous areas. I know that you are faithful to the memory of those whom you call the "fathers of Europe", such as Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, Robert Schuman. From the latter I shall borrow an expression of the central idea of the founders: "To serve humanity still marked by hatred and fear and which is relearning, after such long divisions, Christian brotherhood» (Pour l'Europe, p. 46).

3. It is true that the men and women of this old continent with such a tormented history need to regain the awareness of

that which forms their common identity, of that which dwells in their vast collective memory. Indeed the European identity is not a reality that is easy to understand. The distant springs of that civilization are many, coming from Greece and Rome, from Celtic, Germanic and Slavic sources, from Christianity which profoundly shaped it. We know what a diversity of languages, cultures and juridical traditions mark the nations regions, and also the institutions. However, in the eyes of the other continents, Europe is a single unity, even if its cohesiveness is less clearly perceived by those who constitute it. This viewpoint can aid it in rediscovering itself. In almost twenty centuries Christianity has contributed to shaping an understanding of the world and the human person which today still has a fundamental relevance, despite the divisions, weaknesses, and even abandonment by Christians themselves. Please allow me to recall here some of the essential characteristics. The Christian message translates such a close relationship of the human being with his Creator that it enhances all aspects of life, beginning with physical life: the body and the cosmos are God's work and gift. Faith in God the Creator has demythologized the cosmos in order to open it up to mankind's rational investigation. Mastering his body and exercising dominion over the earth, the human person uses his "creative" capacities; in the Christian vision the human being, far from scorning the physical universe, has it freely and fearlessly at his disposal. This positive vision has greatly contributed to the development of science and technology among Europeans.

At peace with the cosmos, the Christian has also learned to respect the inestimable value of each person created in God's image and ransomed by Christ. Gathered together in families, cities and peoples, human beings do not live and suffer in vain: Christianity teaches them that history is not a meaningless cycle in perpetual repetition, but that it finds meaning in the covenant that God offers to people to invite them to accept freely his Kingdom.

4. The biblical concept of man has permitted Europeans to develop a lofty understanding of the dignity of the person, which retains an essential value even among those who do not adhere to a religious faith. The Church affirms that in man there is an indomitable awareness of the conditions that affect him, a consciousness capable of recognizing his true dignity and being open to the absolute, a consciousness that is the source of fundamental choices guided by the search for good for others as well as for self, a consciousness that is the place of a responsible freedom.

It is true that there has been a lot of drifting away, and Christians know that they have played a part in it. The person, as the unique subject of rights and duties, has often been replaced by the individual, a prisoner of his own selfishness, who thinks he is an end unto himself. On the other hand the exaltation of the group, nation or race has led to totalitarian and murderous ideologies. Everywhere pragmatic or theoretical materialism has threatened the spiritual nature of man and tragically reduced his reasons for living. Democracies have the honour of looking for an organization of society that will enable the person to be not only respected in all that he is, but also to participate in the common task in the exercise of his free will.

5. Your Council has been faithful to this heritage of the European conscience in taking as its main task the proclamation and protection of human rights. By ratifying the Convention for the Safeguard of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms the member States desired to strengthen their union around the most noble principles and values of the European tradition. In order to ensure their application everywhere, they instituted the European Court and Commission for Human Rights, recognizing in them a competence and juridical authority that is unique among international organizations.

As testimony of this, your assembly's reflection on the many aspects of life in society, in consideration of the rights and

dignity of the human person, goes far beyond that which is defined by the specific texts concerning human rights. The Church believes that the human person has the right to the freedom and security necessary for leading his life according to the dictates of a correct conscience, of his spiritual openness to the absolute and his vocation to fraternal life. Among the areas that touch upon what is most profound in man, there are several about which she feels obliged to express her viewpoint.

6. The family is undoubtedly the area where the interaction of personal responsibility with social conditions is most evident. The recent evolution of European society has made the balance-and stability of families more difficult. In this sense factors of the economic order concerning work - especially that of women - housing, displacement of persons, voluntary migration and forced exile play a role. On the other hand we see the expansion of concepts that devalue love, separate sexuality from the communion of life which it expresses, weaken the stable bonds to which a truly human love is committed. There is a real danger of the family's destabilization and break-up. The declining demographic charts are a sign of a disturbing family crisis.

In this situation Europeans must recapture and restore to the family its value as the first element of social life. May they be able to create conditions which favour its stability, which allow it to accept and give life generously! May they regain the awareness of the dignity of the responsibilities exercised by each human being in his own home for the support and happiness of others! The family per se is the subject of rights which must be more clearly recognized.

I cannot fail to recall these concerns briefly here. You know that the Catholic Church attaches importance to this to the point of having proposed a "Charter of the Rights of the Family". Everything that affects the family is a concern which Christian communities deepen in the light of their faith, but which they share with every person who is concerned about human dignity. -

7. One of the most impressive aspects of scientific development involves the biological and medical disciplines. Often in your proceedings you have to recognize the questions raised by the new possibilities of intervention in the various stages of life, which surpass the limits of customary practice. Genetic processes can be favoured, but they can also be altered. Bio genetical processes have begun to affect natural filiation. The diagnosis of prenatal pathology, even though its legitimate goal is of the therapeutic order, leads all too easily to abortion. Experimentation on human embryos opens the way to abusive manipulation. Thus we are coming to the point where serious interventions are accepted for the sole reason that scientific progress makes them possible.

Your Assembly is frequently led to reflect on these questions which have a fundamental ethical nature. It is necessary never to lose sight of the dignity of the person, from the first moment of conception to the final stages of illness or the most serious dimming of mental faculties. You will understand that I am repeating here the Church's conviction: the human being always has value as a person because life is God's gift. The weakest have the right to protection, care and affection on the part of those near to them and the solidary society. The Church's insistence on safeguarding every life from conception is not inspired by anything other than the ethical demand which stems from the very nature of the person and which will not be alien to any free and enlightened conscience. The Church recognizes the dilemma facing numerous couples, as well as doctors and various health counselors - she does not overlook their suffering and doubts; she would nonetheless ask that human consciences never be deformed and that truly human brotherhood never be in default. She

welcomes the progress made to protect the life of the unborn and newborn infants, to preserve their natural genetic heritage, and to develop effective treatments. By placing limitations of the ethical order on man's activity on man, your Institution will fulfil its role as a critical conscience at the service of the community.

8. It will seem natural to you, ladies and gentlemen, if I point out the significance of the work patiently conducted by your Council in the area of social life. You have proposed to Europe a social Charter which seeks to promote the dignity of all workers, harmonious human relations in the world of work, the possibility for all to provide decently for their needs by a job that is suited to their abilities. The task is considerable, even if your countries are rather favoured in comparison to other regions of the world.

The most urgent problem which must mobilize all your cooperation is, first of all, access to employment itself. For too many years this continent has been stricken by an employment crisis which severely affects men and women who are prevented from providing for their personal needs and those of their families in the exercise of a profession for which they are prepared. Is it utopian to ask that when decisions of the economic order are being prepared, consideration be given to the trials of those who lose, with their job, a part of their dignity and sometimes the strength to hope? The Church would also like to encourage all the efforts undertaken to assure the citizens of the nations a true solidarity which, in that it is a human and Christian "virtue", does not seek merely to compensate for loss of resources, but at the same time comprises the determination and audacity necessary to arrive at a better distribution of activity.

We must not forget the pockets of poverty in the bosom of the very nations which form the Council. Appreciable efforts have led to identifying them and to attempting to remedy the marginal situations in which the poorest are found.

9. In the context in which I have been speaking, the young naturally come to mind. It is up to them to give the community of nations dynamism and generosity for the peace and solidarity of a world capable of facing ever new problems. I shall say that to the thousands of European youth whom I am going to meet this evening.

I know that it is your Council's desire to favour educational progress in order to permit everyone to develop their intellectual faculties and fulfil their desire to act.

What formation do we offer youth? Getting back to the studies and actions taken within the framework of your Council, I would simply like to underline an essential aspect. The formation of youth takes its entire human dimension when the acquisition of knowledge and apprenticeship of skills are situated within the context of the total truth about man. In an age when material goods and technologies risk overstepping the appeals of the spirit, is it not necessary to recall the saying that there is no "science without a conscience"? If we propose an initiation to knowledge, it is to help the young people to discover the greatness of their destiny as human beings.

10. One often hears regrets expressed at seeing the young people remain somewhat estranged from the memory of the cultural patrimony established by the people of Europe throughout more than two millennia. One often senses a concern for the conservation of this patrimony. If I briefly mention this question after having spoken about education, it is with the conviction that the incomparable cultural patrimony of this continent must not be merely preserved in order to make it available for the distant or indifferent consideration which one has for relics. Rather, it is important that, from one

generation to the next, they transmit and entrust the testimony of a living culture, the works, discoveries and experiences which progressively contributed to fashioning man in Europe. That is why I wish to encourage not only the remarkable efforts accomplished to rescue from disappearance the riches of the past, but also to make them today's riches. The task will all the better respond to the reality of this continent, which will develop the great tradition of exchanges between one nation with another so that an artist or an intellectual will feel at home in Flanders as well as in Italy, in Portugal as well as in Sweden, on the banks of the Rhine as well as on those of the Danube. Young people in particular are open to cultural exchanges, permitting them to take into account the best of what they received from their fathers, to know the past, to prepare them better to assume the initiative in their turn, and make their creative capacities fruitful.

11. Ladies and gentlemen, if Europe wants to be faithful to itself, it must be able to gather all the living forces of this continent, respecting the original character of each region, but rediscovering in its roots a common spirit. The member countries of your Council are aware that they are not the whole of Europe. In expressing the ardent wish to see intensified the cooperation, already taking shape, with other nations, particularly those of the centre and east, I have the feeling of gathering together the desire of millions of men and women who know that they are bound together by a common history and who await a destiny of unity and solidarity on the scale of this continent.

Over the centuries Europe has played a considerable role in other parts of the world. We must admit that while it has not always given her best in the encounter with other civilizations, no one can deny that it fortunately shared many of the values which it had developed over the years. If Europe wants to play a role today, it must, in unity, clearly base its action on that which is most human and most generous in its heritage.

Good relations between the countries of the various regions of the world cannot remain merely dealings of the political or economic order. With the multiplication of the meetings of people of all continents they will feel once again in a new way how much it is necessary for human communities with different traditions to understand one another. I am sure that it is in this perspective that the recent programme you have put into effect to animate and favour North-South relations is inserted. There is indeed, in the context of universal solidarity, a responsibility which Europe has in relation to that part of the world.

One will already see an important sign of the seriousness of that desire for understanding and peace in the quality of the welcome given among you to whoever knocks at the door coming from elsewhere, that they will immediately become a partner wherever they are forced to seek refuge. For their part Christians, who are seeking to rebuild their own unity, want to manifest their respect for believers in other religions present in their areas, and they wish to undertake with them a fraternal dialogue in all clarity.

Peace is the reward of this esteem for the cultural and spiritual identity of peoples. On this conviction may Europeans base their disinterested contribution to the good of all the nations!

Mr. President, ladies, gentlemen, by coming today before the first international parliamentary Assembly constituted in the world, I am conscious of addressing the official representatives of the peoples who, in fidelity to their origins, have desired to come together in order to affirm their unity and to be open to the other nations of all continents in respect for the truth about man. I can attest to the readiness of Christians to take an active part in the tasks of your Institutions. My

wish for your Council is that you work with success to make the soul of Europe ever more alive and  
generous.

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