



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MINISTERS FOR THE INTERIOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION*

Friday, 31 October 2003

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,¹ I extend a respectful greeting to all, with a special word of gratitude for Hon. Giuseppe Pisanu, who has fittingly expressed your common sentiments. I greatly appreciate the fact that, for the Conference of Ministers for the Interior of the European Union, you have chosen as your theme: *"Interreligious dialogue: factor of cohesion in Europe and instrument of peace in the Mediterranean area"*. Highlighting this topic shows that you understand the importance of religion, not only for the protection of human life but also for the promotion of peace. "Religions worthy of this name", I said at the beginning of 1987 to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, "the open religions spoken of by Bergson - which are not just projections of human desires but an openness and submission to the transcendent will of God which asserts itself in every conscience - such religions permit the establishment of peace.... Without an absolute respect for man founded on a spiritual vision of the human being, there is no peace" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], *Address to Diplomatic Corps*, 10 January 1987, p. 6, n. 6).² Your Conference has taken place in the perspective of the primary objective of the Ministers for the Interior of the European Union, namely, the construction of *a free, secure and just space* in which all feel themselves at home. This entails the search for new solutions to problems connected with respect for life, the rights of families and immigration issues; problems that must be considered not only in the European perspective but also in the context of dialogue with the Countries of the Mediterranean area. The hoped-for social cohesion will increasingly demand that fraternal solidarity which derives from the knowledge of being one family of persons called to build a more just and fraternal world. This knowledge is already present in some way in the ancient religions of Egypt and of Greece that had their beginnings in the Mediterranean, but also, and most of all, in the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And how can one fail to note, with a degree of sadness, that the faithful of these three religions, whose historical roots are in the Middle East, have not yet established among themselves a fully peaceful co-existence right there where they were born? There can never be too many attempts to create frank dialogue and solid cooperation among all the believers in one God.³ Europe, born from the encounter of different cultures with the Christian message, today is experiencing a rebirth in its bosom because of immigration and the presence of various cultural and religious traditions. Experiences of fruitful collaboration are plentiful, and the actual efforts for an intercultural and interreligious dialogue provide glimpses of

a *unity in diversity* that bodes well for the future. This does not exclude an adequate recognition, including legislatively, of the specific religious traditions in which each People is raised and with which they often identify themselves in a particular way. The guarantee and the promotion of religious freedom constitutes a "test" of respect for the rights of others and is realized through the forecast of an adequate juridical discipline by the different religious Confessions, as a guarantee of their respective identities and of their freedom. The recognition of the specific religious patrimony of a society demands the recognition of the symbols that qualify it. If, in the name of an erroneous interpretation of the principle of equality, one gives up expressing such religious traditions and connected cultural values, the fragmentation of today's multiethnic and multicultural societies could easily transform itself into a factor of instability and, thus, of conflict. Social cohesion and peace cannot be built by eliminating the religious features of every People: otherwise, such a proposition would result in less democracy, because it would be contrary to the spirit of nations and the sentiments of the majority of their peoples.⁴ Following the dramatic events surrounding the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001, the representatives of many religions have also redoubled their initiatives in favour of peace. The [Day of Prayer](#) that I conducted at Assisi on 24 January 2002 concluded with a declaration of the religious "leaders" present, called by some "[the Assisi Decalogue](#)". We pledged ourselves, among other things, *to eradicate the causes of terrorism*, a phenomenon that contrasts with the authentic religious spirit; *to defend the right of each person to a worthy existence* according to his or her cultural identity and to freely form one's family; *to sustain the common effort* in order to defeat egoism and suppression, hate and violence, appreciating the experience of the past that peace without justice is not true peace. To the representatives of religions present at Assisi I expressed the conviction that "God himself has placed in the human heart an instinctive tendency to live in peace and harmony. This desire is more deeply rooted and determined than any impulse to violence". For this, the "religious traditions have the resources needed to overcome fragmentation and to promote mutual friendship and respect among peoples.... Whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion's deepest and truest inspiration" ([Holy Father's Concluding Address](#), 24 January 2002, n. 4; *ORE*, 30 January 2002, p. 6).⁵ Despite the failures thus far registered in the initiatives for peace, *we continue to hope*. Dialogue at all levels - economic, political, cultural, religious - will bear fruit. *The trust of believers is founded* not only in human resources but also *on Almighty and Merciful God*. He is the light that enlightens every man. All believers know that peace is a gift from God, and it has its true source in him. Only he can give us the power to confront problems and to persevere in the hope that good will triumph. With these convictions, which I know you share, I wish complete success to the work of the Conference and I invoke the Blessing of Almighty God on you

all.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.46 p.5. © Copyright 2003 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana
