



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE
OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF CENTRIST DEMOCRATIC INTERNATIONAL***

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 21 September 2007*

*Mister President,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you during the conference of the Executive Committee of Centrist Democratic International, and I extend cordial greetings to the Delegates present from many nations throughout the world. I thank your President, the Honourable Pier Ferdinando Casini, for the kind words of greeting he has offered to me on your behalf. Your visit gives me an opportunity to bring to your attention some of the values and ideals that have been moulded and deepened in a decisive way by the Christian tradition in Europe and throughout the world.

Notwithstanding your different backgrounds, I know that you share several basic principles of this tradition, such as the centrality of the human person, a respect for human rights, a commitment to peace and the promotion of justice for all. You appeal to fundamental principles, which, as history has shown, are closely interconnected. In effect, when human rights are violated, the dignity of the human person suffers; when justice is compromised, peace itself is jeopardized. On the other hand, justice is truly human only when the ethical and moral vision grounding it is centred on the human person and his inalienable dignity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, your activity, inspired by these principles, is subject to increasing challenges today due to the profound changes taking place in your respective communities. For this reason, I wish to encourage you to persevere in your efforts to serve the common good, taking

it upon yourselves to prevent the dissemination and entrenchment of ideologies which obscure and confuse consciences by promoting an illusory vision of truth and goodness. In the economic sphere, for example, there is a tendency to view financial gain as the only good, thus eroding the internal *ethos* of commerce to the point that even profit margins suffer. There are those who maintain that human reason is incapable of grasping the truth, and therefore of pursuing the good that corresponds to personal dignity. There are some who believe that it is legitimate to destroy human life in its earliest or final stages. Equally troubling is the growing crisis of the family, which is the fundamental nucleus of society based on the indissoluble bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Experience has shown that when the truth about man is subverted or the foundation of the family undermined, peace itself is threatened and the rule of law is compromised, leading inevitably to forms of injustice and violence.

Another cause highly esteemed by all of you is the defence of religious liberty, which is a fundamental, irrepressible, inalienable and inviolable right rooted in the dignity of every human being and acknowledged by various international documents, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The exercise of this freedom also includes the right to change religion, which should be guaranteed not only legally, but also in daily practice. In fact, religious liberty corresponds to the human person's innate openness to God, who is the fullness of truth and the supreme good. An appreciation for religious freedom is a fundamental expression of respect for human reason and its capacity to know the truth. Openness to transcendence is an indispensable guarantee of human dignity since within every human heart there are needs and desires which find their fulfilment in God alone. For this reason, God can never be excluded from the horizon of man and world history! That is why all authentically religious traditions must be allowed to manifest their own identity publicly, free from any pressure to hide or disguise it.

Moreover, due respect for religion helps to counter the charge that society has forgotten God: an accusation shamelessly exploited by some terrorist networks in an attempt to justify their threats against global security. Terrorism is a serious problem whose perpetrators often claim to act in God's name and harbour an inexcusable contempt for human life. Society naturally has a right to defend itself, but this right must be exercised with complete respect for moral and legal norms, including the choice of ends and means. In democratic systems, the use of force in a manner contrary to the principles of a constitutional State can never be justified. Indeed, how can we claim to protect democracy if we threaten its very foundations? Consequently, it is necessary both to keep careful watch over the security of civil society and its citizens while at the same time safeguarding the inalienable rights of all. Terrorism needs to be fought with determination and effectiveness, mindful that if the mystery of evil is widespread today, the solidarity of mankind in goodness is an even more pervasive mystery.

In this regard, the social teaching of the Catholic Church offers some points for reflection on how to promote security and justice both at the national and international levels. This teaching is based on reason, natural law and the Gospel: that is, principles that both accord with and transcend the

nature of every human being. The Church knows that it is not her specific task to see to the political implementation of this teaching: her objective is to help form consciences in political life, to raise awareness of the authentic requirements of justice, and to foster a greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 28). In this her mission, the Church is moved only by love for humanity and the desire to work together with all people of goodwill to build a world in which the dignity and inalienable rights of all persons will be safeguarded. For those of you who share a faith in Christ, the Church asks you to bear witness to that faith today with even greater courage and generosity. The integrity of Christians in political life is indeed more necessary than ever so that the “salt” of apostolic zeal does not lose its “flavour”, and so that the “lamp” of Gospel values enlightening the daily work of Christians is not obscured by pragmatism or utilitarianism, suspicion or hate.

Your Excellencies, I thank you once again for this welcome opportunity to meet with you. Wishing you success in your respective missions, I assure all of you of a remembrance in my prayers, that Almighty God may bless you and your families, and that you may receive the wisdom, integrity and moral strength to serve the great and noble cause of human dignity.

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