



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

POPE JOHN PAUL II

**TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PARLIAMENTARY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OF
THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE***

Thursday, 17 March 1988

Mr Chairman,

Dear Friends,

1. It gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to welcome you, members of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In conjunction with your other appointments here in Rome, you have wished to include this meeting, and I can assure you that I am happy to express my personal interest and the Holy See's convinced support of the goals and tasks which constitute the mandate of the Council of Europe. I am pleased to recall that Pope Paul VI received the members of your Committee, thirteen years ago, on 5 May 1975, and I myself very much look forward to my visit to Strasbourg next October when I hope to address the plenary meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly.

2. Even a summary account of the tasks of your own Committee serves to highlight the lofty but also pressing ideals which have marked the intentions and procedures of the Council of Europe since its establishment in the wake of the dramatic experiences of World War II. One of your principal tasks is to enlighten and encourage public opinion in relation to European unity, the defence of human rights and the strengthening of democratic principles and practices within the member States. You also maintain contact with the elected parliamentary representatives of the peoples of the twenty-one countries belonging to the Council, seeking to promote a concerted approach to the problems affecting Europe's social, political and cultural development. You also seek to safeguard the freedoms and rights of individuals and groups within the context of the member States' complex and rapidly evolving structures and relationships.

Almost forty years have passed since the setting up of the Council of Europe in 1949. Much of great importance has been achieved in these years. Let one instance stand for all: the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights, with the consequent and progressive attention of public opinion to the need to defend and uphold – everywhere – the dignity of each human being, and the awareness of the inalienable dignity of the person as the basis upon which every society which wishes to be defined as civilized and just must be built. With the passing of time the need to defend human rights and dignity does not diminish. Indeed, it acquires a greater urgency in the face of new situations and in relation to advances in the scientific and technological fields. In this the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly have remained loyal to the original inspiration from which they arose. It is a sign of great hope and encouragement that such should be so in the heart of Europe, the “old” Continent, whose historic destiny has been to contribute so much to the rest of the world, for good and for ill.

3. With its achievements and its failures, Europe has left an indelible mark on the course of history, and it therefore has a responsibility which the Representatives of its peoples cannot but take up and pursue. In the strengthening of a European awareness among all its peoples, including those not represented in your Organization, Europe experiences a vague, almost unconscious, sense of obligation to its own peoples and to the rest of the human family. To rise to the challenge of satisfying this obligation, Europe needs to recover its deepest identity. It needs to overcome whatever reluctance there may be to acknowledge the common patrimony and civilization of its peoples and nations, divided as they are by physical, political and ideological boundaries, but united by the bonds of a culture which truly embraces all.

The anomaly of entrenched divisions within Europe is further increased when it is forgotten that European unity is spiritual in character far more than political. It is grounded for the most part in Christian values and in the humanism stemming from them. As I said some years ago to a group of Bishops from my own homeland: “Despite the different traditions that exist in the territory of Europe between its Eastern part and its Western part, there lives in each of them the same Christianity...

Precisely this lies at the roots of the history of Europe. This forms its spiritual genealogy”. Such a consideration is an extremely important factor in understanding the role of Europe today. It is my profound conviction that, if Europe wishes to regain its fundamental unity, it must turn to the values which Christianity caused to emerge in European society and culture from the beginning.

4. I am particularly happy at this time to express support for the European Public Campaign on North-South Interdependence and Solidarity which the Council of Europe is conducting in order to raise public awareness of the complex relationship between the peoples of Europe and the Third World. The whole question of the interdependence and necessary solidarity between developed and underdeveloped countries forms a substantial part of my recent Encyclical on the Church’s social concern. The Church approaches such questions from an eminently moral and religious

point of view, but when it is a question of justice, peace, fraternity and solidarity between peoples, there is ample room for interaction and collaboration among all the forces that work for the genuine wellbeing of the human family.

May God help us all to love and serve our brothers and sisters ever more wisely and generously. I ask his blessings upon each one of you and your colleagues in the Parliamentary Assembly. May he watch over you and your families, as well as the nations which you represent!

*AAS 80 (1988), p. 1329-1331.

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