



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL ANTONIO MARÍA JAVIERRE ORTAS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1,200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
IMPERIAL CORONATION OF CHARLEMAGNE BY LEO III**

To my Venerable Brother

Bishop Cardinal Antonio María Javierre Ortas

I was delighted to learn that on 16 December next you will preside at an academic celebration of the 1,200th anniversary of the imperial coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III on Christmas in the year 800. Desiring to take part in the celebration of this historical event at least in spirit, I send you this Message, extending my best wishes and greetings to you and to the distinguished assembly.

The commemoration of this historic event invites us to turn our gaze not only to the past but also to the future. For it coincides with the decisive phase in the drafting of the European Union's "Charter of Fundamental Rights". This happy coincidence prompts us to reflect on the value which Charlemagne's cultural and religious reform still represents today: its importance, in fact, is far greater than that of his work for the external unification of the various European political realities of his era.

It is the grand synthesis of the culture of classical antiquity, mainly Roman, and that of the Germanic and Celtic peoples, which characterizes Charlemagne's great contribution to the continent's formation. This synthesis is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for Europe was not a geographically defined unit. Only by accepting the Christian faith did it become a continent. Down the ages this continent succeeded in spreading its values to almost every other part of the world for the good of humanity. At the same time, we must not forget that the ideologies which unleashed rivers of blood and tears during the 20th century came from a Europe that had wanted

to forget its Christian roots.

The European Union's effort to formulate a "Charter of Fundamental Rights" is an attempt at a new synthesis, at the beginning of the new millennium, of the basic values that must guide the coexistence of European peoples. The Church has followed the drafting of this document with keen attention. In this regard, I cannot conceal my disappointment that in the Charter's text there is not a single reference to God. Yet in God lies the supreme source of the human person's dignity and his fundamental rights.

It cannot be forgotten that it was the denial of God and his commandments which led in the last century to the tyranny of idols. A race, a class, the state, the nation and the party were glorified instead of the true and living God. In the light of the misfortunes that overtook the 20th century we can understand: the rights of God and man stand or fall together.

Despite many noble efforts, the text worked out for the "European Charter" does not satisfy the just expectations of many. In particular, the defence of the rights of the individual and the family could have been more courageous. That is why the concern to safeguard these rights, which are not always properly understood and respected, is more than justified. In many European States they are threatened, for example, by policies supporting abortion, which is legalized almost everywhere.

A further threat lies in an attitude that increasingly views euthanasia as a possibility, as well as in certain bills dealing with genetic technology that do not sufficiently respect the embryo as a human being. It is not enough to emphasize the dignity of the person in grand words, if it is then seriously violated in norms of the juridical order.

The great historical figure of the Emperor Charlemagne calls to mind the Christian roots of Europe. Whoever studies him is taken back to an era - despite ever present human limitations - which was marked by an impressive cultural flourishing in almost all fields of experience. In search of its identity, Europe cannot fail to consider making an energetic effort to recover the cultural heritage left by Charlemagne and preserved for over a millennium. Education in the spirit of Christian humanism guarantees the intellectual and moral training that forms young people and helps them to face the serious problems raised by scientific-technological development. The study of classical languages in schools can also be an effective help in introducing the younger generation to the knowledge of a cultural heritage of inestimable value.

I therefore express my appreciation to everyone who has had a part in preparing this academic celebration. I am thinking in particular of Mons. Walter Brandmüller, President of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences. Scholarly initiative makes a valuable contribution to the rediscovery of those values in which Europe's deepest "soul" can be recognized. On this occasion, I would also like to greet the members of the *Augsburg Cathedral Choir Boys*, whose singing has

richly added to the convention.

With these sentiments, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to Your Eminence, to the speakers, to the participants and to the *pueri cantores*.

From the Vatican, 14 December 2000.

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