



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE EUROPEAN STUDY CONGRESS  
ON THE THEME: "TOWARDS A EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION?"**

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to send cordial greetings on the occasion of the European Study Congress which the Vicariate of Rome's Office for the Pastoral Care of the University has sponsored in conjunction with the Commission of the Bishops of the European Union and the Federation of the Catholic Universities of Europe.

The question that is the theme of the Congress - "*Towards a European Constitution?*" - stresses the importance of the current phase in the process of building the "common European house". Indeed, it seems that the time has come to begin the important institutional reforms hoped for and prepared in recent years, which have become more urgently needed with the scheduled admission of new member States.

The expansion of the European Union or rather, for the process of "Europeanization" of the whole continental area, that I have fostered, is a priority to be pursued courageously and quickly in order to respond effectively to the expectations of millions of men and women who know that they are bound together by a common history and who hope for a destiny of unity and solidarity. It requires a rethinking of the European Union's institutional structures to adapt them to the greater needs. At the same time, there is an urgency to establish a new order to identify clearly what are the objectives of the European construction, the responsibilities of the Union and the values on which it must be based.

2. As she contemplates the various possible solutions to this important European "process" in a way that is faithful to her identity and her evangelizing mission, the Church applies what she has already said about individual states: that she "is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution" and respects the legitimate autonomy of the democratic

order (cf. *Centessimus annus*, n. 47). At the same time, by virtue of her identity and mission, she cannot be indifferent to the values that inspire the various institutional decisions. Doubtless, the various decisions in this regard involve moral dimensions since the deliberations that result from them in a particular historical context inevitably lead directly to conceptions of the person, society and the common good from which they sprang and which are inherent in them. On this precise consciousness are founded the Church's right and duty to intervene by making her own contribution, which reflects the vision of human dignity and all its consequences as is spelled out in Catholic social teaching.

In this perspective, the search for and configuration of a new order, which was the aim of the "Constituent Convention" instituted by the Council of Europe at the Laeken Summit in December 2001, should be acknowledged as positive steps in themselves. Indeed, they are geared to that desirable strengthening of the institutional framework of the European Union which can effectively contribute to the development of peace, justice and solidarity for the whole continent through a freely accepted network of obligations and cooperation.

3. However, if a new European order of this kind is to be adequate for the promotion of the authentic common good, it must recognize and safeguard the *values* that constitute the most precious heritage of European humanism, which has assured and continues to assure Europe a unique influence in the history of civilization. These values constitute the characteristic intellectual and spiritual contribution that has formed the European identity through the centuries and is part of the valuable cultural treasure of the continent. As I have recalled on other occasions, they concern the dignity of the person; the sacred character of human life; the central role of the family founded on marriage; the importance of education; freedom of thought, of speech and of the profession of personal convictions and religion; the legal protection of individuals and groups; the collaboration of all for the common good; work, seen as a personal and a social good; political power understood as a service, subject to law and reason, and "limited" by the rights of the person and of peoples.

Expressly, it will be necessary to recognize and safeguard the dignity of the human person and the right to religious freedom in its threefold dimension: individual, collective and institutional.

Moreover one must make room for the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the principle of subsidiarity, as well as for a vision of social and community relations founded on an authentic culture and ethics of solidarity.

4. Multiple are the cultural roots that have contributed to reinforce the values just mentioned: from the spirit of Greece to that of Roman law and virtue; from the contributions of the Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Slav and Hungarian-Finnish peoples, to those of the Jewish culture and the Islamic world. These different factors found in the Jewish-Christian tradition the power that harmonized, consolidated and promoted them. By acknowledging this historical fact in the process leading to a

new institutional order, Europe cannot deny its Christian heritage, since a great part of its achievements in the fields of law, art, literature and philosophy have been influenced by the evangelical message. Not giving in to a temptation to be nostalgic or to be content mechanically to repeat past models, but being open to the new challenges emerging, Europe will need to draw inspiration with creative fidelity from the *Christian roots* that have defined European history.

Historical memory demands it; but also and above all, it is essential to its mission. Europe is called today to be a teacher of true progress, to spread a globalization of solidarity without marginalization, to take part in building a just and lasting peace within it and in the world, to bring together different cultural traditions to give life to a humanism in which the respect for rights, solidarity and creativity will allow every man and woman to fulfil his/her noblest aspirations.

5. A challenging task lies ahead of European political persons! To be fully equal to it they will need to know how to give to such values the *deeply rooted transcendence* that is expressed in openness to the religious dimension.

This will also allow them to reaffirm the non-absolute nature of political institutions and public authorities due to the fact that primarily and quintessentially the human being "belongs" to God, whose image is indelibly stamped on the nature of every man and woman. If this were not to take place, there would be a risk of legitimizing the orientations of agnostic and atheist laicism and secularism that lead to the exclusion of God and of the natural moral law from the sectors of human life. The Continent's civil coexistence has suffered from this tragic experience - as the history of Europe has demonstrated.

6. In this whole process *the specific identity and social role of the Churches and religious confessions* must also be *recognized and safeguarded*. Indeed, they have always played and still play a determining role in many ways, in inculcating the supporting values of coexistence, proposing answers to the fundamental questions about the meaning of life, fostering the culture and identity of peoples, offering Europe what helps to give it a desirable and necessary spiritual foundation.

Moreover, they cannot be reduced to being merely private bodies; they operate with a specific institutional density that deserves to be appreciated and accorded juridical recognition, respecting and not jeopardizing the status that they enjoy in the ordering of the Union's various member states.

In other words, it is a question of reacting against the temptation to build a European coexistence that excludes the contribution of the religious communities with the riches of their message, action and witness. Among other things, the process of building Europe would lack important energies for the ethical and cultural foundation of civil coexistence. I hope, therefore, - in accord with the logic of a "healthy collaboration" between the ecclesial community and the political community (cf.

*Gaudium et spes*, n. 76) - that in this process the European institutions will be able to enter into dialogue with the Churches and religious denominations on regular terms, accepting the contribution they can certainly offer by reason of their spirituality and commitment to the humanization of society.

7. Lastly, I would like to address the Christian communities and all who believe in Christ to ask them to undertake a *vast and coherent cultural action*. Indeed, it is urgent to show - with strong convincing arguments and magnetic examples - that founding the new Europe on the values that shaped it in the course of history and which are rooted in the Christian tradition will benefit all, regardless of their philosophical or spiritual tradition, and serve as the solid foundation of a coexistence that is more human and peaceful because it respects all and each one.

On the basis of these common shared values it will be possible to achieve the forms of democratic consensus required to outline, even at the institutional level, the programme for a Europe that may truly be the home of all, and in which no person and no people feel excluded but all can feel called upon to contribute to the common good, on the continent and throughout the world.

8. In this perspective it is legitimate to expect a great deal from the Catholic universities of Europe. They will not fail to develop a comprehensive reflection on the various aspects of such a stimulating problematic. Your Congress can certainly make a valuable contribution to this research.

As I invoke God's light and comfort upon the involvement of each one, to you I impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 20 June 2002.*

**JOHN PAUL II**