



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE***

Friday, 10 October 2003

*Mr President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians!*

1. I am grateful for the kind words that the Rt. Hon. Bruce George, President of your Parliamentary Assembly, has addressed to me at the end of the Conference on Freedom of Religion promoted by Mr Marcello Pacini, Head of the Italian Delegation. I cordially greet all present and at the same time I thank you for this courteous visit.

From the start of the Helsinki process, the participating States have recognized the international dimension of the right to religious freedom and its importance for the security and stability of the community of Nations. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe continues in its commitment to ensure that this basic human right, founded on the dignity of the human person, is adequately respected. In a certain sense, the defense of this right is the litmus test for the respect of all the other human rights.

2. Mindful of these efforts, I wish today to express my appreciation and at the same time to encourage you to continue generously in this undertaking. It is true that many young people today grow up without being aware of the spiritual heritage that is theirs. Despite this, the religious dimension does not cease to influence vast groups of citizens.

Therefore, it is important that, while respecting a healthy sense of the State's secular nature, the positive role of believers in public life should be recognized. This corresponds, among other things, to the demands of a healthy pluralism and contributes to the building up of authentic democracy, to which the OSCE is truly committed.

When States are disciplined and balanced in the expression of their secular nature, dialogue between the different social sectors is fostered and, consequently, transparent and frequent cooperation between civil and religious society is promoted, which benefits the common good.

3. Just as damage is done to society when religion is relegated to the private sphere, so too are society and civil institutions impoverished when legislation — in violation of religious freedom — promotes religious indifference, relativism and religious syncretism, perhaps even justifying them by means of a mistaken understanding of tolerance.

On the contrary, benefit accrues to all citizens when there is appreciation of the religious traditions in which every people is rooted and with which populations generally identify themselves in a particular way. The promotion of religious freedom can also take place through provisions made for the different juridical disciplines of the various religions, provided that the identity and freedom of each religion is guaranteed.

4. Therefore, I can only invite you, dear Legislators, to embrace the commitment that your Countries have made within the OSCE in the area of religious freedom.

The OSCE is also to be commended for recognizing the institutional weight of this freedom: I am thinking in particular of paragraph 16 of the 1989 Final Document of Vienna. Such a high-profile defense of religious freedom is a strong deterrent to the violation of human rights on the part of communities that exploit religion for purposes that are foreign to it. On the other hand, the proper promotion of religion satisfies the aspirations of individuals and groups, transcending them and bringing them to a more perfect fulfilment.

The respect of every expression of religious freedom is therefore seen to be a most effective means for guaranteeing security and stability within the family of Peoples and Nations in the twenty-first century.

Offering you my best wishes, I invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon all of you and upon your work in the service of the human person and of peace.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XXVI, 2, p.372-374.*

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