



The Holy See

*Message au Conseil de l'Europe,
à l'occasion de l'inauguration de la «Maison de l'Europe» à Strasbourg**

To the President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The house built in stone that will be inaugurated shortly in Strasbourg represents and anticipates the edifice that the men and nations of Europe are building, with their very lives, to face together the period of history that is opening before them.

A long way has been covered since the Council of Europe was created, at the appeal of men of heart and courage, guided by a clear perception of the needs of our times and the aspirations of their peoples, and capable of inventing new ways.

We appreciate particularly – we are anxious to tell you so on this solemn occasion – the work that this Council has been carrying out in the varied and multiple fields of European cooperation for over a quarter of a century. This activity may seem slow, but it marks out the direction of the lives of Europeans as they progress towards a human, more than political unification.

We like to point out that the Council of Europe, the oldest of the European institutions, has earned out this activity in faithfulness to the ideal which the founders expressed in the preamble to its Statute, namely attachment to the human, spiritual and moral values which constitute the common heritage of the peoples of this continent.

And we are happy to stress one of the most meritorious fruits of the concerted action and commitment of the member States of the Council of Europe. Following on a past of wars and destruction, the common values arising from the vitality of ancient and varying peoples, refined by the Greco-Roman heritage, made purer, deeper and universal by the Christian faith, have received, on the plane of juridical principles, renewed and effective expression in the European Convention on Human Rights. This was, one can say, a milestone on the road towards the union of peoples: does it not manifest the sacred determination to build this union on respect for the dignity of the person and for his freedoms and fundamental rights?

It is also encouraging to observe the direction followed in all the work carried out by the Council of Europe. The Committee of ministers, the parliamentary Assembly the Commissions of experts, is served by a Secretariat and a body of officials whose competence equals their dedication. All have carried out from the beginning a resolute action to harmonize and fertilize on a reciprocal basis the social institutions and cultural heritages. They wished, in this way, to give these interwoven solidarities a suitable framework in the perspective of a more effective service of peace and justice in the world.

Precious energies have thus been released, an impetus has been given, a horizon of hope opened, which now make it possible to mobilize the creativity of everyone, and the young in particular, for new progress.

Our predecessors and ourself have not ceased to encourage and stimulate all those who have applied themselves to the construction of a united Europe. By accrediting diplomatic representations to the European institutions, the Holy See wished to manifest its will to be present and to participate, according to the lines derived from its specific mission, in the common effort. The Holy See wished to get to know the patient and laborious advance of this effort, to listen and learn, and thus to contribute, in a continuous dialogue, to strengthen the human – moral and spiritual – elements of the historic enterprise in progress.

The Holy See is itself situated in Europe, and, from its origins, a considerable part of its action, especially in the past, was involved in that of the European States. But it is not for this reason that it participates in the work of the Council of Europe, now that the Vatican City State is merely a guarantee of its spiritual autonomy; it is to all peoples that the Holy See wishes to offer its specific contribution, for their peace and their development. But when coordination takes shape among the nations at a vast regional level, it takes a particular interest in it. And when these nations have all been consolidated in a Christian civilization, it feels specially concerned. Not to dominate the destiny of these peoples, but to help them to realize it better, in conformity with their deep identity and for the good of all.

That the Christian tradition is an integral part of Europe is a question of fact. Even among those who do not share our faith, even where the faith burns low or has died out, the human fruits of the Gospel remain. They now constitute a common heritage which it is up to us to develop together for the advancement of men. The Church continues her mission of evangelization, along her own paths. Certainly, she does not wish to become just the instrument of a human construction or to try to make a human construction the instrument of her progress. But she is aware that, while evangelizing, she promotes man and human values. Always respecting the different movements of civilization and the spheres of competence which are characteristic of civil society, she proposes to you her assistance to strengthen and develop the particularly rich common heritage of Europe, many elements of which are familiar to her, even in harmony with her.

On the basis of this heritage, the Holy See too, looks to the future of Europe with realism and hope. The social cultural, juridical and spiritual conditions and necessities of European peoples are, in its eyes, precious indications to awaken consciences and point out to them the field in which their creative dynamism must be exorcized. Important, too, are the appeals that come from poor countries and the general appeal to construct peace and to find more human ways of life and development, recalled in our Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (nn 47, 77). In these appeals, the conscience of European men and peoples is urged to recognize a "new voice", as it were, which incites it to create institutions capable of permitting Europe to provide a more effective service for the whole human family. Is it going too far to say that Europe in view of the favors that Providence has granted it, has a special responsibility to bear witness, in the interest of all, to essential values such as freedom, justice, personal dignity, solidarity, universal love? And conversely, is it not in a service widened to world dimensions that it will be able to find again or strengthen its reasons for living, its dynamism and the nobility of its soul?

All our action is directed to fostering the blossoming of this dynamism. May you share our conviction that the Church and the Holy See, which is her mouthpiece, make all essential contribution in this regard! Who does not see the deeply human repercussion of the Gospel spirit of brotherhood and the renunciation that this latter implies? Without such a state of mind, it seems to us very difficult to reach the point where each one goes beyond his own point of view, renounces certain advantages and possibly certain of his rights that are not fundamental, in respect of those of others and in view of a higher common good. And without the trust that accompanies real brotherhood, how could the nations understand the fruitful future that commitment in widened solidarities opens up for their own historical heritage?

This tells you how fervently we wish Mr President that the inauguration of the new Palace of Europe may be the symbol and the centre of a new development of the union of European peoples. And we are happy to invoke the blessing of Almighty God who, far from turning us away from earthly tasks, calls upon us to give them the seal of harmony, brotherhood and love.

From the Vatican, 26 January 1977

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*ORa n.6 p.3, 4.