



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II

AI PARTECIPANTI AL 76° RADUNO DI DIALOGO DI BERGEDORF* *Lunedì, 17 dicembre 1984*

1. For your 76th Bergedorf Meeting devoted to the topic of Europe, you have chosen Rome, the Eternal City. And during your discussions you wished to take the opportunity to pay a visit to the Bishop of Rome. I consider this as more than a gesture of courtesy. Since the presence here on the shores of the Tiber of the Princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, and their martyrdom, this unique city has been indissolubly linked with the Church of Christ. Similarly the history and destiny of Europe, its past and its role in the present and in the future, cannot be understood without reference to Christendom and its essential contribution to Western culture.

I therefore bid you a sincere and hearty welcome to this brief meeting in the Vatican. Among you I greet, for the most part, distinguished representatives of politics and science from the various countries of Europe who are lending their rich personal experience and knowledge to these discussions on Europe. But also to my joy I see among you some eminent representatives of the Church, testifying to the great interest with which the Church, and particularly the Holy See, follows these efforts to construct a new consciousness and a new structuring of Europe, based on its precious cultural tradition, in order to meet the fateful challenge of our times.

2. The Europe of our century has been deeply marked by the tragedy of the two fratricidal World Wars and their devastating consequences, as well as by its divisions into ideological, political, military and economic rival camps. These rifts and tensions counteracting unity split the continent from East to West, North to South. Totalitarian regimes are contemptuous of the freedom and basic rights of man. Technological progress, whose boldest conquest is the suspect promise to solve all problems, today rears all the more threateningly against man himself, endangering his survival. Secularism and the breakdown of moral restraint drive man further and further towards disorientation and existential anxiety, towards escape from a responsible attitude which enables him to shape life and the world around him.

The more well known and universal the crisis of the old continent and its civilization becomes, the more man senses the inherent challenge and recognizes his responsibility for Europe and its future. We all know about the growing efforts, in politics and also among Christian Churches, to mend the harmful rifts and breaks which have occurred in the course of history. Today the serious nature of certain problems that come to light, such as security, social justice, peace, economic and cultural exchange, urgently require unity and joint initiatives. But experience shows us the great difficulties which the present process of reunification is encountering at various levels, even within and between the countries of Western Europe, not to mention the whole of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. This of course should come as a surprise to

nobody, much less act as discouragement. If this unity which is to be sought and to be brought about on the European continent and beyond is to be truly viable and lasting, it must consider the legitimate rights of all participants and integrate them organically into itself. This process of maturation can of course occur only gradually. The decisive thing will be that once the path is chosen to the exclusion of any conceivable alternative, there must be no standing still. We must press on, persistently and patiently, however short the steps may have to be.

It is desirable, and indeed will always remain desirable, that Europe find a common language in the field of politics and establish a joint will to act upon the fundamental questions of life. More than ever the voice of Europe as a whole is being consulted upon the solution of the present world crises; the greater therefore is the disappointment when secondary economic problems, lack of collaboration and purely national considerations pile up seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It is time for national self-interest, which may of course have some local significance, to be cut down to proportion. These issues can only fade to comparative insignificance when they are brought face to face with the real problems of mankind. And on those problems Europe must give a unanimous answer in a spirit of solidarity, as soon as possible.

3. It may be the object of your discussions and in fact the responsibility of politicians and social scientists to indicate the practical ways ahead and smooth them out step by step. The Church considers it her task to offer emphatic encouragement in their endeavour, at the same time pointing out that, in so far as European unification is concerned, with the best possible technical, military and political agreements, it must first be provided with a solid foundation and the fertile soil of the equally pressing spiritual and moral renewal of western culture. Here the Church feels immediately called upon in quite a special way. during the first millennium of Europe Christendom integrated Greco-Roman tradition with Germanic, Celtic and Slav cultures and gave life to a common European spirit, so today Christianity is in a position to make an effective contribution and help the different peoples of the continent to create a new European civilization out of their great cultures and national diversity. The advancement of this renewal and common enterprise essentially depends upon strengthening and deepening basic moral and spiritual values, values which Christianity itself taught the former peoples of Europe to cherish and live by: the value of the human being and his inalienable basic rights, the inviolability of life, freedom and justice, fellowship and solidarity, especially with the poor and those deprived of their rights, moral responsibility for their own and the public good, action for underdeveloped peoples, creating a Christian environment and caring for its cultural and religious heritage.

Europe can renew and rediscover itself only through the renewal of those values held in common which shaped its history, its cultural inheritance and its mission in the world. It is here that the Church can and will make her irreplaceable contribution. She is able to help Europe to find its soul and identity, as well as to interpret and take into account its role in the international community of peoples.

I thank you for your visit and wish you every success in your discussions on the future of Europe. May your collaboration in this difficult but vital project of new considerations and new programming for Europe be fruitful and bring forth more and more helpful ideas. May the Lord fortify you in your work and accompany you always with his special protection and his

 blessing.

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