



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO EUROPEAN POLITICIANS AND LEGISLATORS**

Friday, 23 October 1998

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. On the occasion of the second European meeting of politicians and legislators organized by the *Pontifical Council for the Family*, I am pleased to welcome you to the home of the Successor of Peter. I extend my warm thanks to Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of this Council, for his words on your behalf.

I express my deep gratitude to you all for having agreed, on the initiative of the *Pontifical Council for the Family*, to take part in the Holy See's reflections on questions that continue to arise regarding the family and the ethical domain. Scientific and technological progress demand serious, in-depth moral reflection as well as appropriate legislation, so that science may be put at the service of man and society. In fact, they dispense no one from asking fundamental moral questions and from finding suitable answers for the right ordering of society (cf. Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, nn. 2-3). While concerned to know clearly the different scientific aspects, those whose duty it is to make political and social decisions in their nations are called to base their approach on essential anthropological and moral values, and not on technological progress which in itself is not a criterion of either morality or lawfulness. During this century, we have often seen in Europe that when values are denied, the public decisions taken can only oppress the individual and peoples.

2. As has been the case since antiquity with Sophocles and Cicero, the contemporary philosopher, Jacques Maritain, recalls that "the common good of human individuals", consists in "the good life of the multitude" (*Les droits de l'homme et la loi naturelle*, p. 20). The starting point of this

philosophy is the human person, who “has an absolute dignity, because it is in direct relationship with the absolute” (ibid., p. 16). Everyone knows that in our day some would like to justify the work of the politician who “in his or her activity [would] clearly separate the realm of private conscience from that of public conduct” (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 69). But, in fact, the value of the latter, especially in the framework of democratic life, “stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the ‘common good’ as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored” (ibid., n. 70).

3. In the realm of social life, the Church pays great attention to primordial institutions such as the family, the basic cell of society, which can only survive if its principles are respected. The family represents a good of the highest importance for every nation and for all humanity. Already in antiquity, as Aristotle showed, it was recognized as the primary and fundamental social institution, which was antecedent and superior to the State (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 12, 18), and effectively contributes to the good of society itself.

It is therefore important that all who are called to guide the destiny of nations recognize and strengthen the institution of marriage; in fact, marriage has a particular juridical status that recognizes the rights and duties of the spouses to one another and to their children, and families play an essential role in society, whose permanence they guarantee. The family fosters the socialization of the young and helps curb the phenomena of violence by transmitting values and the experience of brotherhood and solidarity which it allows to become a reality each day. In the search for justified solutions for modern society, the family cannot be put on the same level as mere associations or unions, and the latter cannot enjoy the particular rights exclusively connected with the protection of the conjugal commitment and the family based on marriage, a stable community of life and love, the result of the total and faithful gift of the spouses, and open to life. From the standpoint of the leaders of civil society, it is important that they can create the conditions required by the specific nature of marriage, its stability and acceptance of the gift of life. In fact, while respecting the legitimate freedom of individuals, to make other forms of interpersonal relationships equivalent to marriage by legalizing them is a grave decision that can only jeopardize the conjugal and family institution. In the long term it would be harmful for laws that are no longer based on the principles of the natural law but on the arbitrary will of individuals (cf. *CCC*, n. 1904), to give the same juridical status to different forms of common life, which would cause great confusion. Reforms involving family structure, then, must first be concerned to reinforce the conjugal bond and to provide ever stronger support for family structures, while keeping in mind that children, who will play the leading role in social life tomorrow, are the heirs to the values they have received and the care invested in their spiritual, moral and human formation.

One can never subordinate the dignity of the person and of the family to political or economic factors alone, nor to the mere opinion of possible pressure groups, even if these are important. The exercise of power is based on the search for objective truth and on the dimension of service

to man and to society, by recognizing the transcendent and inviolable personal dignity in every human being, even the poorest and the smallest. This is the foundation for working out the political and juridical decisions indispensable for the future of civilization.

4. Moreover, children are one of a nation's chief treasures, and parents should be helped to carry out their educational role, with respect for the principles of responsibility and subsidiarity, thus strengthening the eminent value of this service. This is a duty and an act of legitimate solidarity on the part of all national communities. In a certain way, a society and its structure depend on the family policy it implements.

5. Today, the many actions against life, which claim to be acts of freedom, constitute what I have called the "culture of death" (cf. Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, n. 12), which threatens unborn children and the sick or elderly. It is clear that we are faced with a weakening of the sense and value of life, as well as a certain anaesthetizing of consciences. Furthermore, any attack on a person's life is also an attack on humanity, for there is a bond of brotherhood between all beings, and what happens to a brother or sister cannot leave one indifferent. Christians and people of goodwill are therefore called to join forces with firmness and patience, to make the "culture of life" triumph, particularly with regard to young people, who should be given an appropriate education at the moral, anthropological and biological levels. Freedom and a sense of responsibility must be taught from the earliest age, so that they become what they truly are: "inalienable self-possession and openness to all that exists" (Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, n. 86). Thus young people will be able to understand what the human person is, to take responsible action on behalf of life and become its defenders for those around them.

Protecting life in a world without reference-points implies the use of clear and objective anthropological data to show that from his beginning until his natural end, a person is unique and worthy of the respect due to every human being by the very virtue of his origin and destination. All attacks on life are a form of denial of the human being's personal dignity, which also disfigures humanity and solidarity between human beings, for they are a violation of "the 'spiritual' kinship uniting mankind in one great family, in which all share the same fundamental good: equal personal dignity" (Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, n. 8). All people are called to seek the good of individuals and the common good by promulgating just and impartial laws, for the force of law leads to personal rectitude and the trust necessary for social harmony (cf. *ibid.*, n. 59). I thus invite them to have renewed concern for the formation of people's moral and civic conscience, which, through right reason, will enlighten citizens in their personal and community conduct, based on the principles of truth, justice, equality and charity.

Dear participants in this meeting, whether you are legislators, politicians, or the heads of family or university associations, I encourage you to continue your reflection and to pass on your moral and spiritual convictions to those with whom you work. This is a service for men and women, so that their lives may be in harmony with what they are truly called to be. It is important to help our

contemporaries to seek the truth and to base their life on a sound anthropology: these alone provide the profound meaning of a life, as I stressed in my recent Encyclical *Fides et ratio*.

At the end of this meeting, as I ask Christ to put his Spirit within so that you will remain faithful to the fundamental values and convictions that must guide your mission in society, I cordially grant my Apostolic Blessing to you, to your co-workers and to the members of your families.

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