



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES AND
DIPLOMATIC CORPS OF AUSTRIA***

Saturday, 20 June 1998

*Mr Federal President,
Mr Federal Chancellor,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

1. It is a special joy and honour for me to meet you today, Mr Federal President, together with the members of the Federal Government and representatives of the political and public life of the Republic of Austria. Our meeting once again underscores the *good partnership* that has long existed between Austria and the Holy See.

At the same time we can visibly experience that this harmonious and fruitful relationship is integrated into the broad *network of diplomatic relations*, which links Austria with States throughout the world. I thank the diplomatic representatives present here for the honour they pay me by their attendance and for their commitment to the "*art of peace*".

This historic site is a very appropriate place, first, for broadening our vision beyond the borders of this country towards *the Europe which is growing in unity* and towards its *integration into the family of nations on all continents*, and then for looking into *the interior of Austria* itself.

2. My first Pastoral Visit to Austria, in 1983, began with Vespers dedicated to Europe and celebrated under the sign of the Cross. At the time Cardinal Franz König said to the assembly: "In our small *country on the dividing line between two worlds* ... one can, one must speak of Europe!".

Six years later, as the Wall began to crumble and the Iron Curtain fell, the dividing line between the two worlds seemed a thing of the past. Since then, however, much of the euphoria has vanished and many hopes have been dashed. It is not enough for man to fill his hands with material goods alone, if his heart thus remains empty and finds no meaning. Even if he is not always aware of it and often prefers short-lived, superficial pleasures to lasting, inner joy, eventually he must realize: man does not live on bread and play alone.

3. Actually, the dividing line between the two worlds has disappeared neither from economic affairs nor from human hearts. Even in a socially well-ordered and economically prosperous country such as Austria, a *feeling of being lost and anxiety over the future* are spreading.

Does it not seem that dangerous rifts have appeared in the well-established structure of co-operation between social groups, which has contributed substantially to the country's well-being and to the welfare of its citizens?

Are not Euroscepticism and frustration spreading, only a few years since Austrians voted to join the European Union?

4. After many decades, Austria has gone *from being a borderland to a bridge-land* in European geography. In a few days it will be Austria's turn to preside over the Council of the European Union. Vienna, often the focal point of European history in the past, will now be the centre of many hopes for those countries which are now beginning negotiations to join the European Union. I hope that steps can be taken to bring the East and West of this continent closer together: *the two lungs Europe needs in order to breathe*.

The diversity of Eastern and Western traditions will enrich European culture and will serve, through preservation and mutual exchange, as the basis of the longed-for spiritual renewal. Therefore, one should speak not so much of an "expansion to the East" as of a "*Europeanisation*" of the entire continent.

5. Let me expand a little on this idea. At the start of my Pontificate I appealed to the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square in Rome: "Open the doors to Christ!" (*Homily*, 22 October 1978). Today in this city of such historical, cultural and religious significance, I once again repeat my invitation to the old continent: "*Europe, open your doors to Christ!*".

I am not saying this out of boldness or reverie, but out of hope and realism, because European culture and art, the past and the present were and still are so greatly moulded by Christianity that there cannot be a totally dechristianized or really atheistic Europe.

This is evidenced not only by the churches and monasteries in many European countries, the roadside chapels and crosses throughout Europe, the Christian prayers and hymns in every European language. Countless living witnesses speak even more vividly: searching, inquiring, believing, hoping and loving men and women; *saints of the past and present*.

6. Nor can we forget that European history is closely linked with the history of that people from whom the Lord Jesus came. Unspeakable suffering was inflicted on the Jewish people in Europe and we cannot say that all the roots of these injustices have been removed. *Reconciliation with the Jews* is thus one of the fundamental duties for Christians in

Europe.

7. The builders of Europe face a further task: *creating an all-European area of freedom, justice and peace* out of a Western European island of prosperity. The wealthier countries will have to make material sacrifices so that the inhuman disparity in affluence within Europe will be gradually eliminated. Spiritual help is needed to hasten the further building and strengthening of democratic structures and to foster a political culture in accordance with the requirements of a State ruled by law. For these efforts the Church offers her *social teaching* as a guide, centred on care and responsibility for man, who has been entrusted to her by Christ: "We are not dealing here with man in the 'abstract', but with the *real, 'concrete', 'historical' man*", whom the Church cannot abandon (*Centesimus annus*, n. 53).

8. Here we see the whole world, which seems to be developing more and more into a "global village". Today those who are involved in large-scale economic processes speak of globalization. If the world's regions are moving closer together economically, this must not involve a globalisation of poverty and misery, but priority must be given to a *globalisation in solidarity*.

I am convinced that Austria will play a part in the globalisation process not only for political and economic reasons, but also because of the ties that bind this people to other nations, as shown by her exemplary commitment to her needy brothers and sisters in South-Eastern Europe and her constant aid to developing countries. I also wish to recall Austria's willingness to open her doors to people from other countries where they have been deprived of their religious freedom, their freedom of opinion and or respect for their human dignity. My compatriots also have many things to thank you for in the past. *Remain faithful to the good traditions of this country!* Maintain your willingness to welcome the foreigners who must leave their homeland.

9. With this wish I would like to address an issue that is becoming ever more urgent. Not only you, who live in this country and are responsible for it, must deal with a problem that weighs increasingly on the hearts of individuals, but so must entire families and social classes. I am referring to the growing exclusion of many, especially young and middle-aged people, from the *right to work*.

Conditioned by economic competition, the labour market is not improving, despite positive results. Therefore, I feel duty-bound to raise my voice on behalf of the weak: *the subject of work is man as a person!* Even in the modern working world there must be a place for the weak and the less gifted, for the elderly and the disabled, and for the many young people who have no access to adequate training. Even an era of sophisticated technology cannot forget man! In evaluating human work, one's effort and commitment, loyalty and reliability must also be considered besides the objective result.

10. This brings me to a final topic which is very close to my heart. One of the fundamental concerns of my Pontificate is building a "*culture of life*" to counteract an expanding "culture of death". For this reason I will never tire of pleading for the unconditional protection of human life from the moment of its conception until natural death. Allowing abortion during the first three months, as is the case in Austria, remains a bleeding wound in my heart.

Then there is the problem of euthanasia: death too is part of life. *Every person has the right to die with dignity, when God*

wills it. Whoever thinks of depriving a person of this right is, in the end, depriving him of life. The value of every person is so great that it cannot be measured in terms of money. Therefore it must never be sacrificed either to unlimited private autonomy or to any constraints of a social or economic nature. Many of our older contemporaries recall, and not just from history books, the dark chapters that the 20th century has written, including in this country. If the law of God is disregarded, who can guarantee that at some time a human power will not again claim for itself the right to determine the value or non-value of some phase of human life?

Mr Federal President,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

11. *Loyalty to your homeland and openness to Europe, beholden to the past and ready for the future* — these were the main points of the reflection I wanted to present to you today.

From all the pride with which I gratefully look upon the rich treasure of Christianity, I ask you to consider this patrimony as something that the living Church would like to offer at the end of the second Christian millennium. No one wants to consider the universalisation of this patrimony as a victory or a confirmation of superiority. The profession of certain values only means the effort to work together in building a true universal human community: a community that no longer knows dividing lines between different worlds.

It will also depend on us Christians whether in its temporal endeavours Europe will turn in on itself and its own selfishness, thereby renouncing its vocation and historical role, or will find its soul again in the culture of life, love and hope.

Austria must serve as a bridge in the heart of Europe!

Neither my address on man nor this assessment is abstract, but very concrete: *I wish you all great courage in building this bridge!*

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