



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS EXCELLENCY Mr. YVES GAZZO,
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE COMMISSION OF
EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 19 October 2009

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive you, Your Excellency, and to accredit you as Representative of the Commission of European Communities to the Holy See. I would be grateful if you would kindly convey to H.E. Mr José Barroso who has just been re-elected Head of the Commission my cordial good wishes for him and for the new mandate that has been entrusted to him, as well as for all his collaborators.

This year Europe is commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I wished to acknowledge this event in a special way by going to the [Czech Republic](#). On this land, sorely tried under the yoke of a painful ideology, I was able to give thanks for the gift of the regained freedom which has enabled the European continent to rediscover its integrity and unity.

You have just described, Mr Ambassador, the reality of the European Union as "a zone of peace and stability that gathers 27 States with the same fundamental values". This is a felicitous presentation. However, it is right to point out that the European Union did not endow itself with these values; rather, these shared values brought it into being and have been, as it were, the force of gravity that has attracted to the nucleus of the founding countries the various nations that have successively joined it with the passage of time. These values are the fruit of a long and tortuous history in which, as no one will deny, Christianity has played a leading role. The equal dignity of all human beings, the freedom of the act of faith as the root of all the other civil freedoms, peace as a decisive element of the common good, human, intellectual, social and economic development as a divine vocation (cf. [Caritas in Veritate](#), nn. 16-19) and the sense of history that derives from it are

as many central elements of the Christian Revelation that continue to model the European civilization.

When the Church recalls the Christian roots of Europe she is not seeking a privileged status for herself. She wants to act as a historical memory by recalling first and foremost a truth increasingly passed over in silence namely, the undeniably Christian inspiration of the founding Fathers of the European Union. More profoundly, she also wishes to demonstrate that the basic values come mainly from the Christian heritage which still today continues to nourish it.

These common values do not constitute an anarchic or uncertain aggregate but form a coherent whole which is ordered and expressed historically on the basis of a precise anthropological vision. Can Europe omit the original organic principle of these values that revealed to man both his eminent dignity and the fact that his personal vocation opens him to all other human beings with whom he is called to constitute one single family? Does not letting oneself slip into this forgetfulness mean exposing oneself to the risk of seeing great and beautiful values compete or come into conflict with each other? Furthermore, do they not risk being exploited by individuals and pressure groups desirous of imposing their own interests to the detriment of an ambitious group project which Europeans are waiting for which is concerned with the common good of the continent's inhabitants and of the whole of our world? This danger has already been perceived and reported by a number of observers from very different horizons. It is important for Europe not to allow its model of civilization to fall apart, piece after piece. Its original dynamism must not be stifled by individualism or utilitarianism.

The immense intellectual, cultural and economic resources of the continent will continue to bear fruit as long as they continue to be fertilized by the transcendent vision of the human person, who constitutes the most precious treasure of the European heritage. This humanistic tradition in which many very different branches of thought can be recognized, makes Europe capable of facing the challenges of the future and of responding to the expectations of its population. It is mainly a question of seeking the correct, delicate balance between economic efficiency and social requirements, the safeguard of the environment and above all, the indispensable and necessary support of human life, from conception to natural death, and of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. Europe will really be itself only if it can preserve the originality that has constituted its greatness and is likely to make it in the future one of the major actors in the promotion of the integral development of individuals, which the Catholic Church considers as the only way to remedy the imbalances present in our world.

For all these reasons, Mr Ambassador, the Holy See follows with respect and great attention the activity of the European Institutions, with the hope that by their work and their creativity, they may honour Europe which is more than a continent, rather a "spiritual homeland" (cf. *Discourse to the Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, Prague, 26 September 2009*). The Church desires to "accompany" the construction of the European Union. For this reason she permits herself to

remind the Union of the founding and constitutive values of European society so that they may be promoted for the good of all.

At the time you are inaugurating your mission to the Holy See, I would like to renew to you the expression of my pleasure at the excellent relations enjoyed by the European Communities and the Holy See, and offer you my best wishes, Mr Ambassador, for the successful accomplishment of your noble office. You may rest assured that with my collaborators you will find the welcome and understanding you may need.

Upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon your collaborators, I warmly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 42 p.3.*

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