



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE EUROPEAN COURT FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR ANNIVERSARIES***

To Mr Giorgio Balladore Pallieri President of the European Court for Human Rights and to Mr Tames E.S. Fawcett President of the European Commission for Human Rights

1. The originality and strength of the European Convention on Human Rights lie in the fact that it has made provision - thus serving as models for other international instruments to come - for particular organisms the specific task of which is to see to the protection of violated rights.

It is a question, on the one hand, of the European Commission for Human Rights and, on the other hand, of the European Court for Human Rights of which you are celebrating today the 25th and the 20th anniversary respectively.

The meritorious and delicate activity of these two organisms aims at ensuring respect for the guarantees provided by the Convention, by opening for persons who complain of having been victims of a violation of human rights, access to supranational authorities. In this connection, my venerated predecessor, Pope Paul VI, receiving, on 7 November 1975, participants in the IV international Colloquy on the European Convention for Human Rights, had already said: "Outside such guarantees - as we can see, unfortunately, every day - the finest declarations, of which mankind could be proud, run the risk of having no effect; and the voice of victims of violation of rights, even if it sometimes has some echo in international public opinion, can be mocked with impunity in their own country.

2. But today it is not just a question of recalling the importance of this device, the exemplary value of which, alone, would be sufficient to justify this celebration.

The occasion that gathers today so many eminent personalities from the various member countries of the Council of Europe, has not a purely formal character. It seems to be inspired also by a deeper sense, because its goal is the dignity of the human person.

Does not the ultimate reason for your commemoration lie in that? Is it not a question of a tribute paid to the dignity of the human person, as a fundamental value which the states that signed the European Convention wished to defend and promote? They saw in it perceptively the unquestionable basis on which to edify, in a stable and lasting way all initiatives in the field of the construction of Europe.

Allow me to return to the words I uttered in my recent address to the United Nations: "All these human rights taken together are in keeping with the substance of the dignity of the human being, understood in his entirety, not as reduced to one dimension only. These rights concern the satisfaction of man's essential needs, the exercise of his freedoms, and his relationships with others; but always and everywhere they concern man, they concern man's full human dimension".

3. In a world context in which the person seems to obtain less and less attention because he is subordinated to ideological and economic systems that enslave and exploit him, it is all the more necessary to reaffirm forcefully that his dignity must remain intact.

It is on this conception of the dignity of the person that the various categories of human rights are founded: "civil and political" rights as well as "economic, social and cultural" rights, to use the terminology of the international Pacts now in force.

We must not lose heart when confronted by the apparently insuperable difficulties that emerge from the examination of so many flagrant situations in which human rights are mocked. We must remain convinced that any assault on human dignity, even the most remote one, has repercussions, imperceptible but real ones, on the life of everyone, for an indelible bond unites all human beings. This bond exists for all believers - Christians, Moslems and Jews - and is derived from their faith in the one true God who, as Father of all men, is the source and foundation of human dignity (cf. Declaration *Nostra Aetate* n. 5). For those who have been called to share Christian faith, this bond is summed up in the words: we are all brothers in Jesus Christ.

From this Europe in which Christianity became so deeply rooted throughout its tormented history - in which the lights were not, however, without shadows - there must radiate the moral strength which, alone, can animate the will to respect, defend and promote the dignity of the human person within its frontiers and in solidarity with all those who need it, elsewhere.

The organisms whose anniversary is being celebrated today, make an essential contribution to the accomplishment of this great and noble task, because they are a concrete and credible sign of it. May God bless the efforts of all those who, with such dedication and competence are cooperating in the beneficial results of the work of the European Commission and Court for Human Rights.

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