



The Holy See

*Discours au Président de la République Fédérale d'ALLEMAGNE,
S.E. M. Richard von WEIZSACKER**

3 mars 1994

1. It is a special joy and satisfaction for me today to be able to receive you, the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Germany, accompanied by your distinguished wife, by the Minister for Health and other important members of the Government and administration. I willingly granted your request for this meeting and with my sincere gratitude for this visit bid you a cordial welcome.

2. Your presence brings back to me vivid memories of my two pastoral visits to your country, during which I was able to experience the noble hospitality and the human and Christian values which Germans display in their individual and collective life. My gratitude and recognition go to all the citizens of your esteemed country, which is passing through such a decisive, although none too easy, phase of its history.

After four decades of enforced division the wall between East and West has been surmounted. People's desire for freedom in the Central and East Central European countries was stronger than the dictatorial system enforced by concrete, barbed wire and arms. After this history making phase of the oppressed peoples' self-liberation from the yoke of political tyranny, you, Mr. President, had the honour of celebrating the first true "German Unity Day" on the steps of the Parliament building. Thus you are also the first Federal President of all Germans.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany guarantees complete exercise of freedom of religion. To the benefit of both parties, in Germany relations and co operation between Church and State are on a firm foundation although not entirely without painful historical experience. Church and State view their co operation as founded on the principles of mutual respect, subsidiarity and solidarity, without either interfering in the exclusive areas of the other.

This idea found in the Constitution can be guaranteed only if it finds new embodiment and acceptance in every generation to come. Otherwise the idea and the political reality would be seen

as diverging from one another. As a committed Christian and statesman, Mr. President, you have borne eloquent witness that if social and political activity is deprived of all reference to a supreme authority, it risks losing its moorings and its indispensable existential basis. It ultimately involves the basic question of whether all political structures are entirely within man's right of disposal or whether there is an antecedent and universal authority, the authority which God bestows, against which people must measure what they want to do, to which they are responsible and within whose limits their freedom to create is necessarily circumscribed.

3. Your country's fortunate achievement of political unity in freedom presents special challenges to the German people. This means an added responsibility which you, Mr President, have assumed. You have done so in the face of certain indications of an identity crisis, which is reflected in a loss of moral values. It is the task of the Church and of other forces with responsibility in the State and society to undertake the role of creating an identity if, following the disappearance of customary ways of thinking based on a historical development, people seem unable to find any direction and at the same time do not quite know wherein their identity lies. Spiritual homelessness can quickly draw one's gaze from what is true and good. Such a development demands a great degree of wisdom from those in responsibility. All the characteristics designated as secondary virtues can be given their full meaning only if they are linked to the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1805). It is precisely from this authentic centre of human behaviour that they draw their strength. Otherwise they remain empty forms of behaviour, hiding within themselves the danger of alienation and manipulation.

During this time of radical change and lack of orientation you, Mr. President, have considered it your duty to work to maintain the moral order against all opposition to it. You did so also because of your conviction that the democratic ordering of a State cannot exist without these recognized values.

4. The rediscovery of the cardinal virtues and true ideals is extremely necessary today. The temptations which must be withstood in public life are doubtless great and dangerous. The debate over the protection of life can from time to time cause even Christian politicians to be afraid to speak out clearly in the face of opposition, if they are under the impression that the democratic majority is in favour of killing those human beings who are threatened and in need of protection: the unborn or the terminally ill. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, adopted at the end of a tragic experience of restricting basic freedoms, came into being with a great respect for life and the family as the basis of society, which protects the individual person from totalitarianism. Germany is called not to take the path that violates those essential values which previous generations have recognized as essential.

The loss of accepted standards of value can never justify the silence of a politician who knows that he is responsible to God for human beings and the moral order. The wisdom of a person with political responsibility can be seen in the degree to which he or she confronts what is commonly

accepted by the majority, if the basic values of human culture are at stake. It is precisely in the "border line" questions about life, about which society no longer gives its unconditional consent, that a disconcerting message sometimes needs to be voiced.

5. It has always been your concern, Mr President, to champion the weak in society. You have given asylum to refugees and migrants and pointed out their inalienable rights. In general the problem of human rights and the protection of minorities has been of fundamental concern in your political activity. In this regard please allow me to express my sincere thanks to those in positions of responsibility in the Government and society in the Federal Republic of Germany for the great number of people to whom they have given asylum. In fact, Germany actually has accepted more refugees from crisis areas than all the other countries of Europe combined. So too your country deserves gratitude and recognition for the aid given to the developing nations and the peoples suffering immeasurable want and indescribable distress because of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

6. This year, in international circles and in the Church, we are reflecting on the family's meaning for the Church and society. As I wrote in my Letter to the Families, for the Church and for the whole of society as well, it is extremely important that we do not "run the risk of permissiveness in fundamental issues regarding the nature of marriage and the family!" (n. 17).

Concerning the raising of children, the ancient human virtues such as duty and obedience should not be seen in isolation from Christian virtues as a whole. Today all society shows symptoms of an illness caused by egocentrism and blatant consumerism. a lack of solidarity and concern for one's own interest, whose predominant rationale is cost benefit analysis. It is important to guide children and young people towards independent judgment and autonomy, directed towards the basic goal of the child's independent personality; it is also important that the young person's dignity is respected and that warmth and acceptance are recognized as prerequisites in everything involving upbringing. Parents and teachers themselves must substantiate their teaching, their goals and their authority with credibility and reasons.

On the other hand, anything concerning the education of children is to be guided by the knowledge that all freedom is limited. In the frenetic freedom of recent years there was danger of pursuing that, the mistaken idea that freedom means license for everything and everyone. Freedom is and remains such only when it is combined with responsibility and achieved through it. And responsibility can ultimately be owed only to the one who is the guarantor of true freedom: God himself.

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