



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE HIGHER INSTITUTE OF INTERARMY GENERAL STAFFS

*Castel Gandolfo
Tuesday, 17 September 1996*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you here today. I thank you for having wished to meet the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of the Apostolic See, which has played such a vital and substantial role in the history of Europe and in the formation of European civilization. It can surprise no one that the Holy See follows with the closest attention everything that affects the life and well-being of this continent and its peoples.

Although it is true that in the 20th century Europe has not always given a shining example of justice, peace and solidarity, we must rejoice at the fact that there is a clear new awareness of the need to bring about changes in European society which will ensure a future of security, cooperation and peace. I wish to think that you too are totally committed to building that better future for this continent.

Security cannot consist in a permanent and ever evolving *armed peace*. It must be the result of a certain way of living together in society. In order that peace may truly be a reality for the community of European nations, *what is required is genuine solidarity*, a solidarity which "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42). *That solidarity must be open to everyone*, for it is not possible to live in safety or with peace of mind when our brothers or sisters are beset by fear and anguish.

The vastness of the task is apparent. Will the leaders of countries and those who influence public life truly address the conditions which disrupt the equilibrium of society? Will Europe be governed by a vision which allows only the strongest to succeed, while the needs of the weak and defenceless are ignored? The Church never ceases to proclaim that every human being possesses an inalienable dignity and inalienable rights, independently of and previous to any concession of state or law. If Europe is to be built up in justice and peace, its culture, its legislation, its way of life cannot fail to *recognize and defend the transcendent dimension of the human person*. It is only by recognizing this fundamental aspect of human nature that society can persevere in upholding the rights and responsibilities which inescapably derive from human dignity. Otherwise everything will eventually depend on the arbitrary will of some to the detriment of others, and Europe will risk repeating the errors of the past.

As the present century draws to a close, Christians are preparing to celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. We are called to follow the path of conversion and forgiveness, of respect and love. This is the path which on the eve of the third millennium will enable coming generations to learn the principles governing a society truly worthy of the human person. I pray that you will ever put your professional skills at the service of such a goal. May Almighty God bless you and your work on behalf of Europe and the entire human family.

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