



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE JOHN PAUL II

***TO The Christian Democratic members of
the European People's Party***

Thursday, 6 March 1997

Mr President,

Dear Parliamentarians,

1. To mark the 40th anniversary of the signing of the *Treaties of Rome*, which you have come to celebrate in this city, you have wished to meet the Successor of Peter. I am pleased to welcome you on this happy occasion and I thank Mr Wilfried Martens, your President, for his kind words. I am delighted with your efforts to make these Treaties, the birth certificate of a new Europe, also a call to overcome the confrontations, rivalries and hatred of the past. The importance of this event, which took place 40 years ago, is obvious, especially when one realizes that at the time all European peoples were scarred by the *Second World War*, which in size and in its multiple effects on the human conscience exceeded all previous conflicts.

2. Today, it could perhaps be useful to seek the source of the courage of those men who are called the fathers of Europe, some of whom belonged to your political family. It seems clear that the Christian faith which motivated them and was their primary conviction gave a particular vigour to their involvement in the *res publica* and in the projects they formulated at that time: their political activity was never divorced from their Christian faith. They were also aware of the demands on their personal life which this faith entailed, if they were to explain clearly the basis of their activity and ensure the credibility of their political project. Indeed, the Christian who serves civil society knows that this task requires him to expend great effort, if he is to witness to Christ in his personal conduct and political activity.

Thus the authors of the European project needed a profound vision of man and society and uncommon courage to propose to their peoples — whether they had emerged from the war as the winners or losers — that they establish new relations under the banner of mutual understanding,

and to adopt a European ideal, while underscoring the importance for each individual of belonging to his own nation (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 50); thus these political figures instilled in the people of the continent the desire to build Europe together, by becoming aware of the role of each person and each nation in constructing a great, common home.

3. The European project was not based on the desire for power, but on the idea that mutual dialogue and esteem were essential to establishing peace on the continent and to each nation's dynamic growth. The founding fathers of the European Union proposed to their peoples new ways of coexisting in a community of destiny, not by forgetting the past, but by assimilating it. Action had to be taken to ensure that Europe would never again be the root of wars or the home of ideologies which had destroyed so many human lives and corrupted so many consciences, as did totalitarianism whose memory is still vivid in our minds. It is also important that European peoples strive to fulfil the concrete conditions for making headway in building the Union.

4. The Holy See has followed the European project closely since it began, conscious of the difficulties of an undertaking which demands great efforts and sacrifices from the Union's various member nations. Those who began *the building of Europe* and who forged a certain concept of Europe are an example to its current and future builders.

In fact, the building up of the European Union first of all presupposes respect for every person and for the different human communities, by acknowledging their right to their own spiritual, cultural and social dimensions. Today there is a great temptation to say that belief in God is merely a contingent sociological phenomenon. Faith in Christ is not a purely cultural fact characteristic of Europe; its dissemination to all the continents proves this. Nonetheless Christians have greatly contributed to forming the European conscience and culture. This is not irrelevant to the continent's future, for if the transcendent dimension of the person is neglected in the building of Europe, especially by refusing to recognize the inspirational power of faith in Christ and the Gospel message, a large part of its foundations will be lost. When Christian symbolism is ridiculed and when God is excluded from the human construction, the latter is weakened because it lacks anthropological and spiritual foundations. Moreover, without reference to the transcendent dimension, political progress is often reduced to an ideology. Conversely, those who have a Christian vision of politics are attentive to their contemporaries' personal experience of belief in God; they place their activity within the scope of projects that make man the focus of society and they are aware that their commitment is a service to their brothers and sisters, for whom they are responsible to the Lord of history.

5. One often hears talk of the need to build Europe on the essential values. This requires that Christians involved in public affairs should always be faithful to Christ's message and take care to have an upright moral life, thereby testifying that they are guided by love for the Lord and for their neighbour. Thus Christians who participate in political life cannot refrain from paying special attention to the very poor, to the most destitute and to all the defenceless. They also want just

conditions to be created so that families are assisted with their indispensable role in society. They recognize the incomparable value of life and the right of every being to be born and to live in dignity until his natural death.

The love of others inspires fraternal attitudes and solid relations between individuals and nations, so that the principles of the common good, solidarity and justice will lead to an equitable sharing of work and wealth within the Union and with the countries in need of aid; there should be a generous spiritual motivation if Europe is to remain an open and welcoming continent and if the dignity of our brothers and sisters is not to be denigrated, for society's *raison d'être* is to enable each individual to lead "a truly human life" (Jacques Maritain, *L'homme et l'État*, p. 11).

6. In the years to come, your task will be important, particularly if all the countries that so wish it are to acquire the necessary conditions for their participation in this great Europe with everyone's support. With your discussions and your decisions, you belong among the future builders of European society. By restoring hope to those who have lost it, by encouraging the social integration of those who live on the continent and those who come to settle on it, you are responding to your vocation as Christian politicians.

At the end of our meeting, I commend you to the intercession of the holy patrons of Europe and ask the Lord to enlighten you and make your activity fruitful, as I cordially grant my Apostolic Blessing to you, to the members of your families and to all who work with you.

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