



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE***

Monday, 29 March 1999

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome the members of the Office of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the members of the various Parliamentary Committees: for *Political Affairs*, for *Legal Affairs* and *Human Rights*, for *Migration, Refugees and Demography*. In particular, I greet your President, Lord Russel Johnston, and thank him for his kind words. I also extend my greetings to the Clerk of the Assembly, Mr Bruno Haller.

This year you are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Council of Europe. The work accomplished in half a century has been an eminent service to the peoples of Europe. Even if the difficulties encountered on the path of democracy and human rights were and are considerable, you have maintained the goal set from the start by the Statutes of the Council of Europe: to unite the peoples of Europe more closely on the basis of the heritage of their common values.

2. During these 50 years, moral and spiritual values have proven their fruitfulness and their ability to transform society, as the events which occurred almost 10 years ago in Europe have shown. Today they must remain the basis for continuing to build the European project.

We should first of all remember that there is no just political, economic or social process without respect for the dignity of each person, with all the consequences to be drawn concerning human rights, freedom, democracy, solidarity and freedom.

These values are deeply rooted in the European conscience; they represent the strongest aspirations of European citizens. They must inspire every project which has the noble aim of uniting the peoples of this continent. Your efforts to

express these values and aspirations in terms of law, respect for freedoms and democratic progress are essential; by tirelessly putting the human person and his inalienable dignity at the heart of your concerns and decisions, you will make a lasting contribution to the construction of Europe and will serve the human person and all humanity.

3. Here I would like to mention the war being waged at our doorstep, in Kosovo, which is wounding Europe as a whole. I urgently ask that everything be done so that peace can be established in the region and that the civilian populations can live in fraternity on their land. In response to violence, further violence is never a promising way to exit from a crisis. It is thus fitting to silence arms and acts of vengeance in order to engage in negotiations that oblige the parties, with their desire to reach as soon as possible an agreement that will respect the different peoples and diverse cultures, which are called to build a common society respectful of basic liberties. Such a development can then be recorded in history as a new element promoting the construction of Europe.

4. Moreover, I join my voice to the Council of Europe's in asking that the most basic right, the right to life, be recognized throughout Europe and that the death penalty be abolished. This first and inalienable right to live does not only imply that every human being should be able to survive, but that he should be able to live in just and worthy conditions. In particular, how long do we still have to wait until the right to peace is recognized as a fundamental right throughout Europe and is put into practice by all public leaders? Many people are forced to live in fear and insecurity. I appreciate the efforts made by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and by the other European organizations to implement this right to peace and to alleviate the sufferings of peoples tried by war and violence. Human rights must also be extended in social life. On this subject, we appreciate the fact that, since the Second Strasbourg Summit (1997), the Council of Europe has wanted to give new vitality to society.

5. In the same spirit, it is important not to neglect the creation of a serious family policy which guarantees the rights of married couples and children; this is particularly necessary for social cohesion and stability. I invite the national parliaments to redouble their efforts to support the basic cell of society, which is the family, and to give it its proper place; it is the essential place for socialization, as well as a resource of security and confidence for the new European generations. I am also delighted to see a new solidarity growing among the peoples of Europe, since the continent represents a unity rich in great cultural and human diversity, despite the artificial ideological barriers built with the passing of time.

6. Your Assembly recently declared that "democracy and religion are not incompatible, on the contrary.... Religion, through its moral and ethical commitment, the values it defends, its critical sense and its cultural expression, can be a worthwhile partner of democratic society" (*Recommendation 1396* (1999), n. 5). The Holy See appreciates this Recommendation, since it gives the spiritual life and the involvement of religions in social life and in the service of the human person their rightful place. This reminds us that religions have a particular contribution to make to the construction of Europe, and that they are a leaven for achieving a closer union among peoples.

At the end of our meeting, I encourage you to pursue your mission so that the Europe of tomorrow will first be a Europe of citizens and peoples who together build a more just and fraternal society, from which violence and the rejection of every human being's fundamental dignity will be banned. As I entrust you to the intercession of Sts Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, patrons of Europe, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to all your loved ones.

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