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DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



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**Towards the Restored Europe –
The Mission of the Church in Europe –
The Vision of Europe from
Pope John Paul II to Pope Francis
International Conference
on “Polonia Restituta”
Krakow 29 April, 2019**

1. Your Eminence, Your Excellencies..., our gathering this evening is to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the restoration of independence and statehood to the Republic of Poland, *Polonia Restituta*, after more than 120 years of brutal subjugation of the Polish state by the three so called “Polish divisions,” put into action by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772, 1793 and 1795. The truth is: it was not just or simply the division of Poland; it was actually the extinguishing of Poland, because it marked the end of the Polish state and, in a certain sense, also the end of the Polish nation. Thus, for example, as a nation, the Polish State adopted a *Constitution* on 3rd May 1791, which began with a remarkable invocation of the Triune God (*invocation Dei*). But all these, the State and its *Constitution* would end tragically, as few years thereafter, the Polish State would suffer a brutal and a bloody massacre of men and women in the suppression of the Polish revolt

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in Warszawa in January 1863, and again from *nazism* during and after the German occupation of 1939.

2. Let us recall, by the way, the classic definition of the State by St. Augustine in his great book *De civitate Dei*. There, referring to the *Genesis* account of the murder of Abel by Cain, St. Augustine underlines the necessity of a *status iustitiae* after the assassination of Abel by Cain, because that episode unleashed complete anarchy. According to this original insight of St. Augustine, a minimal guarantee of a minimal state of minimal justice is the ultimate goal of every State. For, the purpose and the goal of the State is nothing else than the *welfare of its citizens, of each and every person*, because every person is created by God in *his image and likeness*. As such, every person bears (is gifted with) an inalienable dignity and an inherent beauty of the soul, as Plato also affirms in his famous *Myth of Gorgias*. In other words, the State, *per se*, has no value, without the *human person, the bearer of dignity*; but the existence of a person is also inconceivable without the State. Without the State, as St. Augustine argued, the person is nothing, because the person would be living under and among an anarchic gang of robbers, as St Augustine underlines in the famous 4th chapter of the 4th book of *De civitate Dei* (*Remota iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?*). On account of this unity of reciprocal relationship between the person and the State, the extinction of the State and the Nation is quickly followed by the extinction of the human person. Accordingly, the security of every human person, especially the weak, the unborn and newly born, the handicapped and the dying is the sole purpose and *raison d'être* of a good State, which must be more than "gang of robbers."

3. Against this background, the celebration of this Jubilee of hundred years of *Polonia Restituta* can not be only a restoration of a single nation, but also the restoration of the human being (human personhood), and especially the restoration of Europe. In 1919 Poland was reborn; and in 1957 Europe was reborn, precisely on March 25th 1957 on the Capitol Hill in Rome. There six founding States signed into existence a restored Europe. It was hoped that *Europe reborn* would be the restoration of the old Christian Europe of Emperor Charles Le Magne, who was crowned and anointed by Pope Leo III on Christmas 800 A.D. in St Peter Basilica, Rome, to inaugurate a holy Empire of Christian humanism and of guaranteed dignity of the human

person. This period ended on 6th August 1806 with the abdication of Emperor Francis II in Vienna under Napoleonic pressure.

4. The founding fathers of the new and restored Europe are well known: Alcide de Gasperi,¹ Robert Schuman,² Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) and Jean Monnet.

It was not by chance that they were Christian and Catholic laymen, and thinking in the famous tradition of a holy Empire in the Augustinian tradition of a balance between Church³ and State.⁴ It was also not by chance that they realized the idea of a European Community on March 25th 1957 on the Capitol Hill in Rome with the flag of twelve stars. These were triple symbolization of what the European Community project aspired to be:

a) March 25th is the Catholic feast Day of the Annunciation of Mary's conception and birth of Jesus by the angel Gabriel. In the patristic tradition of the Church, Mary's assent to the angel's message and her "yes" to God's plan was seen as a sharp contrast to Eve's assent to the serpent's message in the garden and her disobedience to God. Thus the Feast of the Annunciation also celebrated Mary's "yes" which overturned Eve's "No," thereby inaugurating a new era of restored relationship with God and restored/renewed humanity. Founding the European

1 The Italian Catholic layman, Alcide de Gasperi (1881-1954). He was born near Trento (then part of Austria then), and, therefore sensible to the necessity of reconciliation and peace among the different nations. He was educated at the university of Vienna, and was a Cofounder of the *Partito Popolare Italiano* after the First World War in Italy. He was a friend of Don Luigi Sturzo, the founder and the first General Secretary of this *Christian Democratic Party* in Italy.

2 The French Catholic layman, Robert Schumann (1886-1963), was born in Luxemburg, as German-speaking; and, later, after the Second World War, he became the Prime Minister of France and the author of the famous "Schuman-Plan" for organizing the "Montan-Union," as the precursor of the European Community.

3 As "civitas Dei" ruled/sustained by the seven sacraments, the "internal forum," as the internal market place of every human person with motivation and intention and deliberation about good and evil).

4 As "civitas terrena" ruled by law and justice, the "external forum" as the external market place of public affairs and public discussion with public arguments about right and wrong, understandable as a far echo of good and evil, which is seamlessly realized only in the mind of God, in platonic words: in the eternal ideas of God, who overlooks time and eternity.

Community on the feast of the Annunciation was meant to signal, in/with the Community, the restoration of God's original idea of a human community in Paradise.

- b) The twelve stars of the European Community (when, in fact, there were only six States) refer to the twelve stars in the crown of the "woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet" (Rev.12:1); and they represent the complete restoration of God's design at the end of time: the restoration of the twelve OT prophets of Israel in the twelve apostles of the NT. Thus founding the European Community under these symbols meant that the project was seen as also preparing the human way and progress to eternity and to God.
- c) The Capitol Hill symbolized the typology of hills (3) in old, oriental and European tradition of human civilization; namely the hill of: Golgotha, as the hill of God's mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the hill of the Areopagus, as the hill of Greek philosophical insight and reflection about natural law and goodness, and the Capitol, as the hill of Roman law and the codification of justice against arbitrariness and totalitarianism.

These three hills were considered the indispensable and irreplaceable cornerstones for a restored Europe (and *European humanism*).

5. After the collapse of communism in Europe in 1989, Poland was restored to its status as a middle European country, and as a country of European Greek and Christian traditions and civilization. Against this background of the collapse of communism in Europe, Pope John Paul II wrote his famous encyclical letter *Centesimus annus* (1991, hundred years after the first papal encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII (1891).

In *Centesimus annus* Pope John Paul II considers/wonders, whether in the wake of the collapse of communism, capitalism becomes the only option and, as it were, the sole winner in the battlefield of divergent economic and political ideologies of the late 19th and 20th centuries. His response was in the negative, especially to an unqualified capitalism. An acceptable form of capitalism for the pontiff would be a "capitalism that is human, integral and person-centred. It would be a capitalism with a human face"; and for that one needs a strong State to steer the market and to guide the economy.

In this, Pope Benedict XVI with his encyclical letters, *Deus caritas est* (2006) and *Caritas in veritate* (2009), and Pope Francis with his encyclical letter, *Laudato si* (2015), underlie the same perspective and continue the development of a Catholic social thought that upholds a real economy at the heart of which finance functions to promote the integral growth and development of the person. Even private property has a social function. In this sense, the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith is not enough. One needs the visible hand of the four classical principles of the Catholic social teaching:⁵

1. *Personality/Personhood*, as an expression of every human person’s metaphysically added value, understood as a bearer and owner of inalienable dignity.
2. *Solidarity*, not as a vague sense of compassion, but, as the virtue, in the words of Pope John Paul II, which makes one commit to the wellbeing of another.
3. *Subsidiarity*, according to which “all societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help (subsidium) – therefore of support, promotion, development – with respect to lower order of societies.”⁶ *Solidarity* and *subsidiarity* thus have, as scope, the development of persons and their dignity.
4. *Common good*, understood not as gross national product or gross domestic product, but as the guarantee of personal, familial and associative good. The *common good* of every person in a human community is thus the fundamental right to life and to its full realization.

These four basic values are fruits of *Christian humanism*, which will be the heritage of restored Europe; and they must also be seen as the content of the mission of the Church in Europe. For, it is only in these values that we have a clear and strong vision of a European future. So, going towards a restored Europe does not mean going back to the past of *paradise*, but a going forward to the vision of a State institution, restored to serve every person, as unrepeatably in the dignity of his individuality, but created as a relational being to seek his common

5 Cf. Compendium of social teaching of the Church, §160; “This understanding is such that it inspires harmonious living in society,” §77.

6 Cf. Compendium, §185.

good in relationship with others towards a future expressed as an *eternity* with God.

The human person does have priority over the collective and over the State. But, the fact that he/she is not self-sufficient in his/her individuality and distinctiveness makes the person find perfect fulfilment only in a community with other human persons, in friendship and love. This is a crucial insight of European *Christian humanism*; and it points to Christ who, as a person, reveals God as *relational love* and points the human person to a *perfect eternal love*, as his destiny.

And now and very briefly, let us see how the last three Popes have given expression to this European heritage of *Christian humanism*:

On May 6, 2016, in the sublime Sala Regia in the Vatican, the “Charlemagne” Prize was awarded to Pope Francis. In his acceptance speech, Pope Francis asked:

What has happened to you, humanist Europe, champion of human rights, democracy and freedom? What has happened to you, Europe, land of poets, philosophers, artists, musicians, writers? What has happened to you, Europe, mother of peoples and nations, mother of great men and women who knew how to defend and give their lives for the dignity of their brothers?

The primary reference was to the Founding Fathers – Christian Democrats, De Gasperi, Adenauer, Schuman, Monet, as observed above, who, against the horror of totalitarianism and war, started the idea of *Europe as a unity in diversity*, as a dynamic identity in dialogue with the other. Accordingly, in the case of Poland, thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Pope spoke of “A Europe capable of giving birth to a new humanism based on three capacities: the ability to integrate, the capacity to dialogue and the ability to generate.”

Here is the humanism, of which the popes have written a lot; and it is a new humanism, as a cultural attitude and a mental posture, with social and political consequences, which correspond with the profound nature and identity of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI⁷ very often called for “a new humanism for the third millennium,” using an expression he often linked to the role of

⁷ Cf. Papa Benedetto XVI, An “Apostata” from itself: The lost Europe of Pope Benedict XVI, (www.chiesa.espressonline.it), Roma, March 28, 2007.

universities, which we should not forget were born in the context of the medieval expansion of Christianity.

One of the clearest definitions of this new humanism was given by St. John Paul II, who speaking to Catholic university professors on October 4, 2001, said:

It is embodied in the ability to show that the word of faith is indeed a force that illuminates knowledge, it frees it from all servitude, it makes it capable of good.

He went on,

The young generations expect from you new syntheses of knowledge; not encyclopaedic, but humanistic. It is necessary to overcome the dispersion that disorients, and outline open profiles, able to motivate the commitment of research and communication of knowledge and, at the same time, to train people who do not end up turning against man the immense and tremendous possibilities that scientific and technological progress has achieved in our time.

This would be an atheistic humanism; and for that St. Pope John Paul II had a warning: "As at the beginning of humanity, even today when man wants to have the fruits of the tree of knowledge at his own will, he ends up finding himself a sad operator of fear, confrontation and death."⁸

As a church too, we do have a role to play. As Church, we overcome borders. For, the church – according to St. Benedict – was itself a unity in diversity. But to recreate a European ideal that does not defeat the different stories, the different past of its members, but rather articulate them as open stories not surrounded by walls which recreate hope. According to Pope Benedict XVI, it is "hope which generates energy, which stimulates the intellect and gives the will all its dynamism."⁹ Without hope, the Church itself has no historical

8 Cf., too, *Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II durante la visita al Parlamento Europeo*, 11 Ottobre, 1988; Giovanni Paolo II: *Messaggio ai Partecipanti al Convegno "Verso una Costituzione Europea?"* (Roma 20-23 giugno 2002).

9 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Address: Meeting with government Members, Representatives of State Institutions, diplomatic Corps and Major Religions*, Cotonou, 19 Nov. 2011.

meaning because Christianity is the hope of salvation. A very beautiful path is offered by Pope Francis, who on the 25th November 2014, in Strasbourg, speaking to European parliamentarians, said:

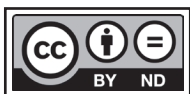
How then to give hope to the future, so that, starting from the young generations, we find confidence to pursue the great ideal of a united and peaceful, creative and enterprising Europe, respectful of rights and aware of your duties?

To answer this question, let me use an image. One of the most famous Raphael frescoes found in the Vatican depicts the so-called School of Athens. At its centre are Plato and Aristotle. The first with the finger points upwards, towards the world of ideas, we could say towards the sky; the second extends his hand forward, towards the viewer, towards the earth, concrete reality. This seems to be an image that well describes Europe and its history, made of the continuous encounter between heaven and earth, where the sky, on the one hand, indicates the opening to the transcendent, to God, which has always characterized European man. The earth, on the other hand, represents its practical and concrete ability to deal with situations and problems. The future of Europe depends on the rediscovery of the vital and inseparable link between these two elements. A Europe that is no longer capable of opening up to the transcendent dimension of life is a Europe that slowly risks losing its soul and also that “humanistic spirit” which also loves and defends.

I conclude with the words of Saint John Paul II, who in the same speech to which I have referred to above, urges:

For you, when the new humanism is a perspective, a project, a commitment, it will then become a vocation. To this “high standard” you are called at the beginning of the new millennium.

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