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## **Welcome Address to the Members of the CCEE**

*Santiago de Compostela*

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Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am very pleased to take part in the annual Plenary Assembly of the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe, which this year is entitled: *Europe, Time to Wake Up? The Signs of Hope*.

This theme urges us to think about our being disciples of Christ in Europe at the present time. Often Catholics from other continents, visiting European countries, ask us this question: «What is happening in Europe?». A question that includes different domains: culture, public life, education, family and birth rates, vocations, etc.

Pope Francis views the current crisis in Europe as very serious, because it undermines the very transmission of Christian culture. On accepting the Charlemagne Prize, the Holy Father asked the following questions: «What happened to you, humanist Europe, champion of human rights, democracy and freedom? What happened to you, Europe, the mother of peoples and nations, the mother of great men and women who were able to defend and give their lives for the dignity of their brothers and sisters?».

Therefore, I believe that the theme chosen by the members of the CCEE is a sign of their awareness of the concern expressed by the Holy Father, which they also share. Professor Chantal Delsol, who in her many books and speeches has delved into these aspects of our contemporary crisis and of the roots of hope, will help us reflect on *Catholicism after Christianity*. I greet and thank Professor Delsol for her contribution to our discussion, which aims to grasp the causes of this crisis, above all to identify the signs of hope.

Dear brothers, it is a fortunate coincidence that on 1 October we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the proclamation of three holy women as co-patron saints of Europe. As a matter of fact, in 1999, Saint John Paul II proclaimed Saint Bridget of Sweden, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross as co-patronesses of the European continent. Three women, three Europeans, three saints who have greatly contributed to shaping the culture and conscience of European society. Their work,

imbued with the renewing power of the Gospel, during different – albeit always troubled – moments in history, gave rise to a Christian conscience that produced new and peculiar forms of social and political relations. Forms which reveal the foundation of the richness and uniqueness of the culture of the European continent.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI, in his *Lectio Magistralis* at the University of Regensburg in 2006, observed in this regard: «The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (cf. *Acts* 16:6-10) - this vision can be interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry (...) this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe».

The great Christian writers and martyrs of the century that has just ended: Henri De Lubac in his drama of atheistic humanism, Romano Guardini in his writings on universities, the White Rose group, and others, such as Rémi Brague or Robert Spaemann or Roger Scruton - prompt us to look closely at this passage from modernity to a stage in history filled with uncertainty, but also at the good wheat that, at the same time, is growing in the most unexpected places.

The sobering and realistic synthesis of 19th and 20th century Europe written in 1879 by Cardinal John Henry Newman, who will be canonized in just a few days, helps us understand the root of the current crisis: the «(...) framework of society, which is the creation of Christianity, is throwing off Christianity» (...) «the Philosophers and politicians (...) would substitute first of all a universal and a thoroughly secular education, calculated to bring home to every individual that to be orderly, industrious, and sober, is his personal interest. Then, for great working principles to take the place of religion, for the use of the masses thus carefully educated, it provides the broad fundamental ethical truths, of justice, benevolence, veracity, and the like (...)». (L.H. Newman, *Biglietto Speech*).

Alasdair MacIntyre, a philosopher, wrote that Newman has provided us with an insightful diagnosis of the *fragmentation* of knowledge in universities, which have become "*utilitarian academies*" that transmit knowledge without sapiential unity. The reason and symptom of this fragmentation is the exclusion of theology from academic departments. This exclusion, under the pretext of neutrality, limits the human spirit and its capacity to ponder the profound meaning of reality.

Faced with the need to establish a dialogue between European culture and the different religious and cultural traditions it inevitably comes into contact with, Benedict XVI wrote that, on the contrary: «A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures (...) modern scientific reason (...) bears within itself (...) a question that points beyond itself. (...) The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur - this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time» (Lecture given at the University of Regensburg, 2006).

The Holy Father Francis, in continuity with his predecessors, sees the relaunch of the social doctrine of the Church as the main road toward a renewed *implantatio*

*Evangelii* in Europe. For example, *Laudato si* makes overcoming fragmentation - through an integral general vision - one of its main pillars, in order to deeply affect society and offer opportunities to young people. This Encyclical expresses the Church's concern for our Common Home, adopting a methodology that has a great evangelizing potential. It is expressed not only in a wide-ranging dialogue, by being open to all and interpreting young people's concerns beyond their employment worries, but above all by pursuing the path of testimony. Greta Thunberg's massive popularity shows that contemporary young people, energized by her example, have embraced the goal of safeguarding creation as their own. *Laudato Si* pursues this broadly shared goal by pointing to the method of the testimony of faith in the context of a dialogue for our Common Home.

Pope Francis expresses his realism with a few sentences that we are all familiar with by now: "Reality is more important than ideas"; "The whole is greater than its parts", just to mention a few. To me, these two maxims seem to be particularly apt for European reconstruction and have an impact on academic work, which is under pressure to provide specialized training too quickly, whereby academic departments are gradually reduced to becoming *higher vocational schools*. This situation does not promote the acquisition of a consistent synthesis and hinders the development of a culture that can give answers to the profound questions of the human spirit, overcoming economic and scientific reductionism and the State's centralizing and totalizing role, both at national and European level. Young people are looking for a broad and realistic horizon, with a non-compartmentalized economy that offers opportunities for work and for the care of our common home.

I would like to end my welcome address by recalling what Saint Pope Paul VI wrote, as a commentary on the parable of weeds among the wheat: a simile that I believe describes quite well the current times the Church is going through in Europe. Saint Paul VI wrote: «Every detail will ultimately be fulfilled according to the Gospel's plan: the wheat sown by Christ, sown by God in the world, will become ripe, which means that no praiseworthy endeavor, no wish or effort to strengthen and expand good shall be lost: since the eternal reward is ensured for those who bring good wheat into the heavenly barns». Thank you.

+Cardinal Marc Ouellet