HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE
BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0157

Giovedì 30.03.2006

UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI AL CONVEGNO PROMOSSO DAL PARTITO POPOLARE EUROPEO

UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI AL CONVEGNO PROMOSSO DAL PARTITO POPOLARE EUROPEO

Alle ore 12 di questa mattina, nell'Aula della Benedizione del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI ha ricevuto in Udienza i partecipanti al Convegno promosso dal Partito Popolare Europeo e ha loro rivolto il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Honourable Parliamentarians,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to receive you on the occasion of the Study Days on Europe, organized by your Parliamentary Group. The Roman Pontiffs have always devoted particular attention to this continent; today's audience is a case in point, and it takes its place in the long series of meetings between my predecessors and political movements of Christian inspiration. I thank the Honourable Mr Pöttering for his words addressed to me in your name, and I extend to him and to all of you my cordial greetings.

At present, Europe has to address complex issues of great importance, such as the growth and development of European integration, the increasingly precise definition of neighbourhood policy within the Union and the debate over its social model. In order to attain these goals, it will be important to draw inspiration, with creative fidelity, from the Christian heritage which has made such a particular contribution to forging the identity of this continent. By valuing its Christian roots, Europe will be able to give a secure direction to the choices of its citizens and peoples, it will strengthen their awareness of belonging to a common civilization and it will nourish the commitment of all to address the challenges of the present for the sake of a better future. I therefore appreciate your Group's recognition of Europe's Christian heritage, which offers valuable ethical guidelines in the search for a social model that responds adequately to the demands of an already globalized economy and to demographic changes, assuring growth and employment, protection of the family, equal opportunities for education of the young and solicitude for the poor.

Your support for the Christian heritage, moreover, can contribute significantly to the defeat of a culture that is

now fairly widespread in Europe, which relegates to the private and subjective sphere the manifestation of one's own religious convictions. Policies built on this foundation not only entail the repudiation of Christianity's public role; more generally, they exclude engagement with Europe's religious tradition, which is so clear, despite its denominational variations, thereby threatening democracy itself, whose strength depends on the values that it promotes (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 70). Given that this tradition, precisely in what might be called its polyphonic unity, conveys values that are fundamental for the good of society, the European Union can only be enriched by engaging with it. It would be a sign of immaturity, if not indeed weakness, to choose to oppose or ignore it, rather than to dialogue with it. In this context one has to recognize that a certain secular intransigence shows itself to be the enemy of tolerance and of a sound secular vision of state and society. I am pleased, therefore, that the European Union's constitutional treaty envisages a structured and ongoing relationship with religious communities, recognizing their identity and their specific contribution. Above all, I trust that the effective and correct implementation of this relationship will start now, with the cooperation of all political movements irrespective of party alignments. It must not be forgotten that, when Churches or ecclesial communities intervene in public debate, expressing reservations or recalling various principles, this does not constitute a form of intolerance or an interference, since such interventions are aimed solely at enlightening consciences, enabling them to act freely and responsibly, according to the true demands of justice, even when this should conflict with situations of power and personal interest.

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today:

- protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death;

- recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family - as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage - and its defence from attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different forms of union which in reality harm it and contribute to its destabilization, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable social role;

- the protection of the right of parents to educate their children.

These principles are not truths of faith, even though they receive further light and confirmation from faith; they are inscribed in human nature itself and therefore they are common to all humanity. The Church's action in promoting them is therefore not confessional in character, but is addressed to all people, prescinding from any religious affiliation they may have. On the contrary, such action is all the more necessary the more these principles are denied or misunderstood, because this constitutes an offence against the truth of the human person, a grave wound inflicted onto justice itself.

Dear friends, in exhorting you to be credible and consistent witnesses of these basic truths through your political activity, and more fundamentally through your commitment to live authentic and consistent lives, I invoke upon you and your work the continued assistance of God, in pledge of which I cordially impart my Blessing to you and to those accompanying you.

[00469-02.02] [Original text: English]

[B0157-XX.02]