



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL ROGER ETCHEGARAY
SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE SOCIAL WEEKS OF FRANCE**

*To Cardinal Roger Etchegaray
Special Envoy to the Social Weeks of France*

1. Only 100 years ago, in a turbulent political period marked by many changes, the *Social Weeks of France* came into being to offer Christians and more generally people of good will the opportunity to think about social issues, while honouring the fundamental human and spiritual values.

In the context of our time, it is particularly interesting that the *Social Weeks* are tackling the theme of *Europe, party to the building of a society to be created*, during their 79th session that is taking place in Lille, the European capital of the year 2004, from 23 to 26 September. I thank God for the contribution Christians make to the reflection on the complex current economic, political and social problems in order to promote the renewal of our society. Drawing inspiration from the Church's social teaching, they contribute to the formation of the conscience of citizens who, each in his or her own capacity, are called to take part in civil life.

2. The centenary of the *Social Weeks* is an opportunity to rediscover the long tradition of the Church's social Magisterium and the many saints who have left their mark on the European Continent since the early centuries: Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, Boniface, Thomas More, the Martyrs of the Pontons de Rochefort, Edith Stein, Maximilian Kolbe, Bridget of Sweden; they all showed that the Gospel and Christian values are fertile soil, both for the lives of persons and peoples, and for building society. Today, the Gospel and the Church's social teaching are suggesting a new approach. If they do not give direct instructions, as this pertains to freedom and responsibility of the people and the Authorities who govern them, they nonetheless identify the indispensable foundations on which to build society, so that individuals and peoples may be increasingly respected and the freedom and dignity of every being promoted.

Reinterpreting our Continent's past invites a constant search for new ways of collaboration, brotherhood and peace. This year, when the 60th anniversary of the Liberation is being celebrated, how can we fail to look at the shameful wars that are fratricidal conflicts, and work for a *rapprochement* between nations so that each one may say: "War never again. Every person is my brother or sister". The past 60 years have brought hope. They have been distinguished by many gestures of reconciliation and the desire to make Europe a Continent of brothers and sisters; this desire was first postulated by Christian statesmen whose names live on in everyone's memory, such as Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi.

3. Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, opens new paths to the peoples who were for so long under the yoke of Communism. The two World Wars created divisions and forms of antagonism that the construction of Europe will help gradually to overcome, in order to build a Europe of the peoples, a Europe of solidarity, in brief, a Europe made for the well-being and happiness of all its citizens. Its example can open the way to other forms of integration for countries on other continents, such as, for instance, Africa. True integration, if it is to preserve its full riches, must preserve national cultures and identities that can form part of the common heritage and contribute to the growth of the entire Continent. In this regard, I acknowledge the presence of many foreign delegations at the *Social Weeks*. Their presence shows that the "peaceful coexistence and the exchange of mutual interior riches will make it possible to build a Europe capable of becoming a home for everyone, in which each person can be welcomed and none will suffer discrimination, where all people are treated responsibly and can live responsibly as members of a single great family" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 102). The opening between East and West also invites Europeans to strengthen relations of cooperation between North and South, to keep in check the ills of poverty, pandemics and conflicts of all kinds. In the face of these urgent needs, we are all called to take part in a true and lasting development that passes through international cooperation, founded on partnership and solidarity. Concern to preserve the earth's riches and to enable all peoples to benefit from the planet's resources in just and equitable sharing is vital.

4. In this spirit, the presence of Christians in social life constitutes a true witness. Through their way of apprehending and analyzing the different social phenomena and of proposing solutions, they show the meaning of the human being and the hope that comes to them from Christ, and recall the place of the moral and spiritual Christian values which are at the root of their lives and actions. It is particularly important to pay special attention to young people. It is essential not only to guarantee them knowledge, but also to pass on to them values and hope to combat certain types of behaviour, such as suicide and drug abuse, which are increasingly observed among the young. Young people expect adults to be supportive so that they may look with serenity to the future, and our goal is to bequeath to them a spiritual and moral heritage (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 14).

5. The involvement of Christians in politics is important. I invite them not to shirk from their mission in this area and always to seek coherence between the Gospel, the divine and apostolic Tradition,

the Magisterium of the Church and the options and decisions they are required to take. The vocation of the Christian faithful is to serve their brethren disinterestedly, for "a civilization ever more worthy of man" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 105), especially with a view to an international cooperation that is more and more closely knit, in which partnership and solidarity get the upper hand over the quest for benefits and profit.

6. May your reflection contribute to facing the many challenges that the construction of Europe poses and to working for international relations where the human being is given due respect! As I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Notre-Dame de la Treille, as well as to the saints who in their own way shaped Europe, I impart to you, Your Eminence, as well as to the organizers and participants in this meeting of the *Social Weeks of France*, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 20 September 2004

JOHN PAUL II