



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCES OF EUROPE**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 3 December 1990*

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. As participants in the *Conference of Presidents of the Industrial Conferences of Europe*, members of UNICE (l'Union des Confédérations de l'Industrie et des Employeurs d'Europe), I am particularly pleased to have this occasion to welcome you to the Vatican and to express my appreciation of your commitment to the arduous but important task of promoting development and progress. I am grateful to your President for the kind words spoken on your behalf.

As business leaders, you have come together to sign and publicize a *Common Declaration* in the framework of the so-called "new European architecture", the new situation of Europe resulting from the extraordinary political and institutional transformations which have been taking place internationally. When you met in Paris in December 1988 you stated that *Europe was your "common enterprise"* and you committed yourselves to greater cooperation in industry, and to solidarity with the Governments and peoples of Europe in the construction of a better future for this Continent. No approach to European development in prosperity and peace is possible without taking into account the specific contribution of business leaders to the present and future well-being of society.

2. The Church, in her social teaching, respects and defends the right of economic initiative as an expression of the subjective creativity of individuals and groups (Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15). But she emphasizes strongly that the *economic process*, which has a decisive influence on the life of almost every inhabitant of the earth, *does not end in the production of wealth and material goods*. Economic activity has an intrinsic social and moral function stemming

from the inalienable dignity of the people involved and from the principle of the prior universal destination of goods (Cf. *ibid.*, 42). Fortunately, a too narrow concept of development is giving way to a growing consciousness of the need to place economic growth at the service of the human, social, cultural and political advancement of peoples.

It is against the background of these general principles that I am pleased to note your concern to work for a development that improves standards of living in Europe, that respects the environment, that takes into account the special needs of less developed regions, that seeks to strengthen freedom and democracy, solidarity and peace. For this you intend to promote respect for the human aspects of all strategies and programmes.

3. Europe is your common enterprise. You are therefore committed to the advancement of the single European market, with all that it entails of freedom of movement for people, capital and goods. But you are also aware that Europe is not merely or primarily an economic reality: it is above all a sublimely rich and intense cultural and spiritual experience. Likewise, European integration cannot be envisioned except as embracing the whole extension of the continent, which is determined by geography but even more so by the common religious heritage shared by its peoples, almost all of whom were baptized at one stage or another into the Christian faith.

Europe has the historical foundations and the spiritual and cultural resources necessary to build a way of life based on a *humanism capable of correcting the materialistic and technological excesses present in other models of development*. Business and industry will contribute to the achievement of this goal in the measure that they pursue objectives that are not merely economic but truly human. The members of your Association have a significant role to play in the growth of a society that takes full account of the spiritual dimension of its people, overcoming outdated contrasts between faith and science, between religion and "progress". In this respect, the only worthy goal of all our efforts is the realization of a European continent which is ever more the expression of the highest values of the human spirit.

4. The Church has surely been the single most important factor in the formation of the "character" of Europe. From the Church's two thousand year experience, allow me to draw the certain conclusion that no model of progress that does not take into account the *ethical and moral dimensions of economic activity* will succeed in winning the hearts of Europe's peoples. The primacy of the "spiritual" - in the widest sense of this term - is a principle from which the peoples of Europe cannot depart without doing violence to their constitutive historical genesis and development.

Moreover, Europe has always been distinguished by its openness to the rest of the world. Without ulterior motives of domination, it now has a calling to be open to the so-called "South" of the world: those vast sectors of humanity which are in need of Europe's help in order to be able to take charge of their own destiny. It is my hope that as business leaders you will always be convinced

that poverty and the economic dependence of poorer nations is a *moral category* which makes serious ethical demands on the decisions to be made concerning the ownership and the use of the world's wealth and goods (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42).

5. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I appeal to you to work in your "common enterprise" for the well-being of the millions of human beings in Europe and elsewhere who stand to benefit from the realization of an authentically human development and progress. Recall the Gospel parable of the "faithful and wise steward", who gives the members of the household their portion of food at the proper time (Lk. 12:42-44). We are all *administrators, not absolute owners of the world that God has placed in our hands* in order to make it bear fruit for the greatest benefit of all, and ultimately for his own glory. That glory is reflected not only in the beauty of nature but in the dignity of every human being, the image of God, and in the beauty of peace and brotherhood between all the members of the one human family. May he who is the Father of all give you the wisdom and courage to use your resources, to direct your economic, civic and political influence towards the construction of a world of justice, peace and solidarity.

Wishing you success in your deliberations, I invoke God's blessings upon you and your families.

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