

# EUROPE 2014 IS A NEW BEGINNING POSSIBLE?

Notes from Fr. Julián Carrón's Speech at the Presentation of the CL flyer.  
Milan, April 9, 2014

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**1. WHAT IS AT STAKE?**

Europe was born around a few great words, like *person*, *work*, *matter*, *progress*, and *freedom*.

These words achieved their full and authentic depth through Christianity, acquiring a value that they did not previously have, and this determined a profound process of "humanization" of Europe and its culture. For example, just think about the concept of *person*: "Two thousand years ago, the only man who had all human rights was the *civis romanus*, the Roman citizen. But who decided who was a *civis romanus*? Those in power. One of the greatest Roman jurists, Gaius, defined three levels of tools which the *civis [romanus]*, who had full rights, could possess: tools which do not move and do not speak; those which move and do not speak, which is to say, animals; and those which move and speak, the slaves" (cf. Gaius, *Institutionum Commentarii quattuor*, II, 12-17; L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's, 1997, p. 90).

But today all of these words have become empty, or they are gradually losing their original significance. Why?

**In a long and complex process**, from which we cannot exempt the mortification of some of these words—like freedom and progress—by the same Christianity that had contributed to generating them, at a certain point in the European trajectory, the attempt took hold to render autonomous those fundamental acquisitions from the experience that had permitted their full emergence. Then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote years ago, in an address given in Subiaco, Italy, that, as a result of a long historical process, "At the time of the Enlightenment... in the opposition of the confessions and in the pending crisis of the image of God, an attempt was made to keep the essential values of morality outside the contradictions and to seek for them an evidence that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions. In this way, they wanted to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity. At that time, it was thought to be possible, as the great deep convictions created by Christianity to a large extent remained and seemed undeniable" (J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto e la crisi delle culture [The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures]*, LEV-Cantagalli, Rome-Siena 2005, p. 61). Thus developed the Enlightenment attempt to affirm those "great convictions," whose evidence seemed able to support itself apart from lived Christianity.

What was the result of this "claim"? Did these great convictions, on which our coexistence has been founded for many centuries, withstand the verification of history? Did their evidence hold up before the vicissitudes of history, with its unforeseen elements and its provocations? The answer is in front of all of us.

Cardinal Ratzinger continued: "The search for such a reassuring certainty, which could remain uncontested beyond all differences, failed. Not even the truly grandiose effort of Kant was able to create the necessary shared certainty.... The attempt, carried to the extreme, to manage human affairs disdaining God completely leads us increasingly to the edge of the abyss, to man's ever greater isolation from reality" (*Ibid.*, pp. 61-62).

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**What demonstrates this isolation of man from reality?** It would be enough just to realize what effect this process has had on two of the things that we, as modern Europeans, hold most dear: reason and freedom.

"This Enlightenment culture," said Cardinal Ratzinger, "is essentially defined by the rights of freedom; it stems from freedom as a fundamental value that measures everything: the freedom of religious choice, which includes the religious neutrality of the state; freedom to express one's own opinion, as long as it does not cast doubt specifically on this canon; the democratic ordering of the state, that is, parliamentary control on state organisms; ...the safeguarding of the rights of man and the prohibition of discriminations. Here the canon is still in the process of formation, given that there are also rights of man that are in opposition, as for example, in the case of the conflict between a woman's desire for freedom and the right of the unborn to live. The concept of discrimination is ever more extended, and so the prohibition of discrimination can be increasingly transformed into a limitation of the freedom of opinion and religious liberty.... And [for example] the fact that the Church is convinced of not having the right to confer priestly ordination on women is considered by some up to now as something irreconcilable with the spirit of the European Constitution." Therefore, Ratzinger continues, indicating the ultimate results of the trajectory, "A confused ideology of freedom leads to dogmatism, which is showing itself increasingly hostile to freedom.... The radical detachment of the Enlightenment philosophy from its roots becomes, in the last analysis, contempt for man." Now, "This philosophy does not express man's complete reason, but only a part of it, and be-

cause of this mutilation of reason it cannot be considered entirely rational.” Thus, “The real opposition that characterizes today’s world is not that between various religious cultures, but that between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on one hand, and from the great religious cultures on the other” (*Ibid.*, pp. 42-43; 51-53).

This does not mean assuming a prejudicially “anti-Enlightenment” position. “The Enlightenment is of Christian origin,” writes Ratzinger, “and it is no accident that it was born precisely and exclusively in the realm of the Christian faith” (*Ibid.*, p. 58). In a memorable speech from 2005, Benedict XVI recalls the “fundamental ‘yes’ to the modern era” that it pronounced—without, however, underestimating “the inner tensions as well as the contradictions.” Benedict XVI thus emphasizes the overcoming of that situation of “clash,” in which “it seemed that there was no longer any milieu open to a positive and fruitful understanding” between faith and the modern era, typical of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Address to the Roman Curia*, December 22, 2005).

**At this point, we can better understand** what Europe’s problem is, what the root of its crisis is, and what is truly at stake. Let us turn again to Benedict XVI:

“The problem Europe has in finding its own identity consists, I believe, in the fact that in Europe today we see two souls:

- One is abstract anti-historical reason, which seeks to dominate all else because it considers itself above all cultures; it is like a reason which has finally discovered itself and intends to liberate itself from all traditions and cultural values in favor of an abstract rationality. Strasburg’s first verdict on the crucifix was an example of such abstract reason which seeks emancipation from all traditions, even from history itself. Yet we cannot live like that and, moreover, even ‘pure reason’ is conditioned by a certain historical context, and only in that context can it exist.

- We could call Europe’s other soul the Christian one. It is a soul open to all that is reasonable, a soul which itself created the audaciousness of reason and the freedom of critical reasoning, but which remains anchored to the roots from which this Europe was born, the roots which created the continent’s fundamental values and great institutions, in the vision of the Christian faith” (Benedict XVI, *Interview for “Bells of Europe,”* October 15, 2012).

What is at risk today is precisely man, his reason, his freedom, and the freedom of critical reasoning.

“The greatest danger,” said Fr. Giussani years ago, “is not the destruction of peoples, killing and murder, but the attempt by the reigning power to destroy the *human*. And the essence of the human is freedom, i.e., the relationship with the Infinite.”

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Therefore, the battle that must be fought by the man who feels himself to be a man is “the battle between authentic religiosity and power” (“True Religiosity and Power: Notes from a conversation between Luigi Giussani and a CL group in New York, March 8, 1986,” *Traces*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005, pp. 18-19; full text: Vol. 4, No. 2, 2002, pp. I-XII).

This is the nature of the crisis, which is not primarily economic. It has to do with the foundations. “In terms of the underlying anthropological issues, what is right and may be given the force of law is in no way simply self-evident today. The question of how to recognize what is truly right and thus to serve justice when framing laws has never been simple, and today in view of the vast extent of our knowledge and our capacity, it has become still harder” (Benedict XVI, *Visit to the Bundestag*, September 22, 2011). Without the awareness that what is at stake is the *evidence* of those foundations, without which a stable coexistence will not be possible, we distract ourselves in the debate over the consequences, forgetting that their origin lies elsewhere, as we have seen. Regaining the foundations is of the utmost urgency for us.

**Responding to this urgency** does not mean returning to a religious state or to a Europe that is based on Christian laws—almost a sort of new edition of the Holy Roman Empire—as if this were the only possibility to defend the person, his freedom, and his reason. That would be against the very nature of Christianity. “In so far as religion of the persecuted, in so far as universal religion, ... [Christianity] has denied the state the right to regard

religion as a part of state ordering, thus postulating the freedom of faith.... Whenever Christianity, against its nature and unfortunately, had become tradition and religion of the state..., it was and is the merit of the Enlightenment to have again proposed [the] original values of Christianity [all men, without distinction, are creatures made in the image of God, and they all have the same dignity] and of having given back to reason its own voice” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., pp. 57-58). Therefore, what is necessary is not to return to an antiquated moment, but to undertake a path in which a true dialogue regarding the foundations is possible.

In these new conditions, where do we start again?

## 2. MAN’S HEART DOES NOT SURRENDER

Despite all of the prodigious attempts to set man aside, to reduce the need of his reason (by reducing the scope of his question), the need of his freedom (which cannot help but express itself in his every move as a desire for fulfillment), man’s heart continues to beat, irreducible. We can discover this in the most varied attempts—sometimes confused, but no less dramatic, >>>

» and somehow sincere—that the Europeans of today make to reach that fullness that they cannot help but desire, and that sometimes hides beneath contradictory disguises.

This example can help us to understand the nature of the problem, the reductions with which reason and freedom are normally lived: “Tonight,” a friend writes to me, “I went to dinner with two high school classmates of mine who are engaged and living together. After dinner, we sat and talked for a while, and the question about having children came up. My friend said, ‘I will never bring a child into this world. With what courage would I condemn another wretch to unhappiness? I will not take on that responsibility.’ And then he added, ‘I am afraid of my freedom. In the best case scenario, it is useless, and in the worst, I could cause someone pain. What I expect from life is to try to do the least damage possible.’ We talked for a long time, and they told me about a lot of the fears with which they live, and about how they already feel that they can’t hope for anything more from life. And they are just 26 years old.”

Behind the refusal to have children lies nothing but the fear of freedom, or perhaps the fear of losing a freedom conceived of in a reduced way, that is, the fear of giving up oneself and one’s own space. But how much will that complex of fears that blocks him determine his life? To speak about “great convictions” is to speak about the foundations, that is, the foothold that makes possible the experience of freedom, of freedom from fear, and allows reason to look at reality in such a way that it does not suffocate us.

The episode recounted above shows that “the bewilderment about the fundamentals of life” does not erase the questions. Rather, it renders them more acute, as Cardinal Angelo Scola says: “We must re-write, re-think, and therefore re-live what sexual difference means, what love is, what it means to procreate and educate, why one should work, why a pluralistic civil society can be richer than a monolithic society, how we can be able to encounter each other, reciprocally, to build effective communion in all the Christian communities and good life in civil society, how to renew finance and the economy, how to look at fragility, from illness to death, at moral fragility, how to seek justice, and how to constantly learn to share the need of the poor” (A. Scola, “Responsible for a Gift,” *Traces*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2014, pp. 36-39).

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This is the nature of the provocation addressed to us by the crisis in which we are immersed.

“A crisis,” said Hannah Arendt, “forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the cri-

sis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin, 1968, pp. 174-175).

**Therefore, rather than a pretext for complaint** and closure, all of these problematic points in European common coexistence represent a grand occasion to discover or rediscover the great convictions that can ensure this coexistence. That these great convictions may fade should not surprise us. Benedict XVI reminds us of the reason: “Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere.... Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning.” The ultimate reason for which a new beginning is always necessary is that the very nature of the evidence of those convictions is different from that of “material inventions. The moral treasury of humanity is not readily at hand like tools that we use; it is present as an appeal to freedom and a possibility for it” (*Spe Salvi*, 24).

But fundamental decisions about what?

### 3. THE FOCUS IS ALWAYS MAN AND HIS FULFILLMENT

Behind every human effort, there is a cry for fulfillment. Listening to this cry is in no way taken for granted, and it constitutes freedom’s first choice. Rilke reminds us of the temptation to hush it up, which is always lurking within us: “And all things conspire to keep silent about us, half out of shame perhaps, half as unutterable hope” (“Second Elegy,” vv. 42-44, in *Duino Elegies*, Shambhala, 1992).

He who does not give in to this temptation finds himself seeking forms of fulfillment, but he is always exposed to the risk of taking shortcuts that seem to let him reach his goal more quickly and in a more satisfying way.

This is what, for example, we see today in the attempt to obtain fulfillment through the so-called “new rights.” The discussion that has grown up around them shows what the debate about foundations means, and what its possible outcomes are.

Since the mid-1970s, the “new rights” have become increasingly numerous, with a strong acceleration in the past 15 to 20 years. Their origin is that yearning for *liberation* that was the soul of the protest movement in the 1960s—it was not by chance that abortion was legalized for the first time in 1973 in the United States, and in those same years, laws regarding

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divorce and abortion began to appear in Europe, as well. Today we hear about the right to marriage and adoption among people of the same sex, the right to have a child, the right to one's own gender identity, the rights of transsexuals, the right of the child not to be born if he is unhealthy, the right to die... The list goes on and on.

Many people feel these new rights to be an affront, a real attack on the values on which Western—and particularly European—civilization has been founded for centuries. To say it better: these new rights exercise a great attraction on many people—and, for this reason, they spread very easily—while others fear them as factors of the destruction of society. It is around these themes of “public ethics” that today—not only in Italy, but in all of Europe and around the world—the deepest social rifts and the most intense political controversies are created.

**Why this strange mix** of appeal and aversion? Let us try to ask ourselves where the so-called “new rights” originate.

Ultimately, each of them is born from profoundly *human needs*: the need for affection, the desire for maternity and paternity, the fear of pain and death, the search for one's own identity, etc. Each of these new rights has its roots in the constitutive fabric of every human existence—hence their attraction. The multiplication of individual rights expresses the expectation that the juridical system can resolve these human dramas and assure satisfaction of the infinite needs that dwell in the human heart.

Their common trait is that they are centered on a man who lays claim to an *absolute self-determination* in every circumstance of life: he wants to decide if he lives or dies, if he suffers or not, if he has a child or not, if he is a man or a woman, etc. This is a man who conceives of himself as *absolute freedom*, without limits, and who does not tolerate any sort of conditioning. Self-determination and non-discrimination, with this cultural background, are therefore the key words of the culture of the new rights. “The contemporary ‘I’—like an eternal adolescent— ... does not want to hear about limits. To be free means, then, to put oneself in the condition of always being able to access new possibilities... claiming to be able to reduce desire to enjoyment... to be pursued and grasped—mainly, in the socially organized form of consumption: of goods, of course, but also of ideas, experiences, and relationships. But, immediately after having attained them, we perceive their insufficiency. And yet, we start over again every time, focusing on another object, another relationship, another experience..., continuing to invest our psychological energies in that which, when put to the test, cannot but reveal itself to be disappointing” (M. Magatti-C. Giaccardi, *Generativi di tutto il mondo, unitevi!* [*Gene-*

*ratives of the World, Unite!*], Feltrinelli, Milan 2014, p. 14).

This culture carries within itself the conviction that the attainment of more and more new rights constitutes the path to the realization of the person. In this way, man thinks that he can avoid or render superfluous the debate about the foundations, which can be summed up in Leopardi's question: “And who am I?” (G. Leopardi, “Night Song of a Wandering Asian Shepherd,” v. 89). But not to ask the question regarding what the subject is, what the “I” is, is like trying to cure a disease without making a diagnosis! So, since the debate about the foundations is felt to be too abstract with respect to life's needs, we entrust ourselves to techniques and procedures. From this position began the race to obtain the recognition of the new rights from legislation and jurisprudence.

**But the critical point of contemporary culture** lies precisely in the myopia with which it looks at the profound needs of man: not grasping the infinite scope of man's constitutive

needs, it proposes—on the material plane as well as the “affective” and existential plane—an infinite multiplication of partial responses. Partial responses are offered to reduced questions. But, as Cesare Pavese reminds us, “What a man seeks in his pleasures is an infinite, and no one would ever give up hope of attaining that infinity” (*Il mestiere di vivere* [*This Business of Living*], Einaudi, Turin 1952, p. 190). Thus, a multiplication, even to the *n*th degree, of “false infinities” (to use Benedict XVI's term) will never be able to satisfy a need of infinite nature. It is not the quantitative accumulation of goods and ex-

periences that can satisfy man's “restless heart.”

The drama of our culture, therefore, does not so much lie in the fact that man is allowed everything, as in the false promises and illusions that that permissiveness carries with it. Each person can verify in his own experience whether the attainment of more and more new rights is the path to his fulfillment—or whether it does not, in fact, produce the opposite consequence, since the incomprehension of the infinite nature of desire, the lack of recognition of the fabric of the “I,” leads *de facto* to a reduction of the person to gender, to his biological or physiological factors, etc. Here, the contradiction intrinsic to a certain conception of man that is so widespread in our advanced societies clearly emerges: we exalt, in an absolute manner, an “I” without limits in its new rights and, at the same time, implicitly affirm that the subject of these rights is basically a “nothing,” because he dissolves in antecedent factors, whether they be material, natural, or accidental.

**What does all of this tell us** about the situation of man today? What we have said also judges those efforts that op- ➤

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» pose this tendency, but without bringing into question the common framing of the problem. Some of them, in fact, expect the solution from legislation to the contrary—and thus they, too, avoid the debate about the foundations. Of course, the right legislation is always better than the wrong legislation, but recent history demonstrates that no just law in itself has succeeded in preventing the drift that we see happening before our eyes.

Both sides share the same framing. T.S. Eliot's words are true of both of them: "They constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good" (*Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, "Choruses from the Rock" [1934], p. 106). This regards one group as much as the other.

But the attempt to resolve the human questions with procedures will never be sufficient.

Benedict XVI says it again: "Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last forever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom." Rather, "If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined—good—state of the world, man's freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.... In other words: good structures help, but of themselves they are not enough. Man can never be redeemed simply from outside" (*Spe Salvi*, 24, 25).

Is there another path?

#### 4. EXAMINING THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

Only by focusing on man and his constitutive yearning for fulfillment, his profound need, will we be able to re-write, re-think, and re-live values. In fact, "man's religious sense appears as the root from which values spring. A value is ultimately that perspective of the relationship between something contingent and totality, the absolute. Man's responsibility, through all the kinds of provocation that reach him in the impact with reality, commits itself in answering those questions that are posed by man's religious sense (or man's 'heart' as the Bible calls it)" (L. Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere* [*The "I," Power, Works*], Marietti 1820, Genoa 2000, p. 166). It is the religious sense, it is the complex of those ultimate needs that define the depths of every human being, that measures what a "value" is. Only the awareness of the factor common to all men can open the path to the search for shared certainties.

"The solution to the problems that life poses every day," said Fr. Giussani years ago, "does not come about by directly facing the problems, but by exploring more deeply the na-

ture of the subject who faces them." In other words, "one resolves the detail by further understanding the essential" (A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*Life of Fr. Giussani*], Rizzoli, Milan 2013, p. 489).

This is the great challenge that Europe is facing. The great educative emergency demonstrates the reduction of man, his dismissal, the lack of awareness of what man truly is, of what the nature of his desire is, of the structural disproportion between what he expects and what he can achieve with his efforts. We have already recalled the reduction of reason and freedom; to these we now add the reduction of desire. "The reduction of desires or the censure of some needs, the reduction of desires and needs is the weapon of power," said Fr. Giussani. "What surrounds us, the dominant mentality, ... power, achieves [in us] an extraneousness from ourselves" (*L'io rinasce in un incontro: 1986-1987* [*The "I" is Reborn in an Encounter: 1986-1987*], Bur, Milan 2010, pp. 253-254; 182). It is as if they tore our being away from us; we are thus at the mercy of many reduced images of desire, and we illusorily expect the solution to the human problem from some rules.

Faced with such a situation, we ask ourselves: Is it possible to reawaken the subject so that he can truly be himself, become entirely aware of himself, further understand his nature as subject, and thus free himself from the dictatorship of his own "little" desires and of all of the false responses? Without this reawakening, man will not be able to avoid domination by all sorts of tyrannies that are unable to give him the longed-for fulfillment.

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**How is desire reawakened?** Not through a line of reasoning or some psychological technique, but only by encountering someone in whom the dynamic of desire has already been activated. To this effect, let us observe how the dialogue between the young writer of the letter and his friends who are afraid of their freedom continues. The young man, after having listened to the tale of all of his friends' fears, affirms: "You are right to be afraid—you are intelligent, and you realize that freedom is something great and difficult, and that life is serious. But don't you want to be able to taste freedom? And wouldn't you want to be able to desire happiness?" I told them that I am unable to rid myself of this desire! They remained silent for a few moments, and then said, "That is what we envy the most about you, that you are not afraid! And, when we were saying our good-byes at the end of the evening, he said to me, 'Let's get together more often, because when I am with you, I am less afraid, too.'"

No one treasured this experience more than Fr. Giussani, as simple as it was radical and culturally powerful, in order to respond to the question about how the "I" is reawakened:

“What I am about to give,” said Giussani, “is not a response [suitable only] to the situation in which we find ourselves...; what I am saying is a rule, a universal law, as old as man’s existence: the person finds himself again in a living encounter [like the one we just heard described: “That is what we envy the most about you, that you are not afraid... Let’s get together...”], that is, in a presence he comes across and which releases an attractiveness, ... provokes us to acknowledge the fact that our hearts, with what they are made of, ... are there, that they exist” (*L’io rinasce in un incontro: 1986-1987*, op. cit., p. 182). This heart is oftentimes asleep, buried beneath a thousand pieces of debris, a thousand distractions, but then it is reawakened and provoked to a recognition: it exists, the heart exists, your heart exists. You have a friend; you find, on the street, a friend for life when this happens to you with him, when you find yourself in front of one who reawakens you to yourself. This is a friend—all of the rest leaves no trace.

“Above all, that of which we are in need at this moment in history are men who, through an enlightened and lived faith, render God credible in this world.... We need men who have their gaze directed to God, to understand true humanity. We need men whose intellects are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects can speak to the intellects of others, and so that their hearts are able to open up to the hearts of others” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., pp. 63-64).

Thus one understands the good that the other constitutes for him. In fact, without the encounter with the other—and with a certain other—it would be impossible for an “I” that opens itself to the fundamental questions of life, that does not content itself with partial responses, to emerge or to sustain itself. The relationship with the other is an anthropologically constitutive dimension.

## 5. THE OTHER IS A GOOD

It is on this foundation—that is, the awareness that the other is a good, as the dialogue between these friends demonstrates—that Europe can be built. Without recovering the elementary experience that the other is not a threat, but a good for the realization of our “I,” it will be difficult to emerge from the crisis in which we find ourselves, in human, social, and political relations. From here derives the need that Europe be the space in which different subjects, each with his or her own identity, can encounter one another in order to help each other to walk toward the destiny of happiness for which everyone yearns.

To defend this space of freedom for each and for all is the definitive reason to vote in the upcoming elections for the re-

newal of the European Parliament, for a Europe in which there are neither impositions from any side, nor exclusions motivated by preconceptions or affinities different from one’s own. We will vote for a Europe in which each person can make his own contribution to its construction, offering his own witness, recognized as a good for everyone—without any European being forced to renounce his own identity in order to belong to the common house.

Only in the encounter with the other will we be able to develop together what Habermas called a “process of argumentation sensitive to the truth.” In this sense, we can become even more aware of the significance of Pope Francis’ affirmations: “Truth is a relationship. As such, each one of us receives the truth and expresses it from within, that is to say, according to one’s own circumstances, culture, and situation in life, etc.” (*Letter to a Non-Believer*, September 11, 2013). “Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above

all an attentiveness which considers the other ‘in a certain sense as one with ourselves’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 199). Only in such a renewed encounter will the few great words that generated Europe be able to come to life once more. Because, as Benedict XVI reminds us, “Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own [nor can it be generated by a law], but must always be gained anew by the community” (*Spe Salvi*, 24). This recovery of the fundamental convictions does not happen, if not in a relationship. The method through which the “fundamental convictions” (person, absolute value of the individual, freedom and dignity of every human being...) emerged is the method through which they can be recovered. There is no other way.

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**We Christians are not afraid** to enter, without privileges, into this wide-ranging dialogue. This is, for us, a precious occasion to verify the capacity of the Christian event to hold up in front of new challenges, since it offers us the opportunity to witness to everyone what happens in existence when man intercepts the Christian event along the road of life. Our experience, in the encounter with Christianity, has shown us that the lifeblood of the values of the person are not Christian laws or juridical structures and confessional politics, but the event of Christ. For this reason, we do not place our hope, for ourselves or for others, in anything but the re-occurrence of the event of Christ in a human encounter. This does not in any way mean that we are contrasting the dimension of >>>

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» the event and the dimension of the law, but that we recognize a genetic order among them. It is precisely the re-occurrence of the Christian event that allows the intelligence of faith to become intelligence of reality, and thus able to offer an original and significant contribution by bringing to life those convictions that can be introduced into the community organization.

This is the clarification that lies at the heart of *Evangelii Gaudium*: the observation that, in the Catholic world, the battle for the defense of values has, over time, become so pre-eminent that it ends up being more important than the communication of the novelty of Christ, the witness of His humanity. This exchange of antecedent and consequent demonstrates the “Pelagian” error of much of today’s Christianity—the promotion of a “Christianist” Christianity (Rémi Brague), deprived of Grace. The alternative is not found, as some people complain, in a “spiritualistic” flight from the world. Rather, the true alternative, as we have seen, is the Christian community—when not emptied of its historic substance—which offers its original contribution “by reawakening in men, through faith, the forces of authentic liberation” (Benedict XVI, in *Accanto a Giovanni Paolo II [Alongside John Paul II]*, Ares, Milan 2014, p. 18).

Those who are engaged in public life, in the cultural or political fields, have the duty, as Christians, to oppose today’s anthropological drift. But this is an undertaking that cannot involve the entire Church as such, as it has the obligation, today, to encounter all men, independently of their ideology or political affinity, in order to witness the “attraction of Jesus.” The commitment of Christians in politics and in the spheres where the common good of men is decided remains necessary. In fact, through the Church’s model of social doctrine, it indicates the formulas of shared coexistence that Christian experience has verified. Today, this is more important than ever—without ever forgetting that, in the present circumstances, such an undertaking assumes, in the Pauline sense, more of a certain *katechontic* value, that is, critical of and containing, within the limits of possibility, the negative effects of pure procedures and of the mentality that creates them. It cannot, however, presume that, from its action, no matter how praiseworthy, the ideal and spiritual renewal of the city of men can mechanically arise. This is born from “what comes before,” *primerea*, from a new humanity generated by love for Christ, by Christ’s love.

**It is this awareness that allows us** to see the limits of the positions of those—on one side or the other—who believe that they can resolve everything through procedures or laws, and thus think that defending a space of freedom is too little. Many would like the attainment of rights, or their prohi-

bition, to be ensured by politics. In this way, they would be spared “being good,” as Eliot said. What does the fact that “not even the truly grandiose effort of Kant was able to create the necessary shared certainty” teach us? What do we learn from our recent history, having seen that good laws were not enough to keep the great convictions alive? There is a long road to a “shared certainty” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., p. 62).

**The path that the Church has traveled** in order to clarify the concept of “religious freedom” can help us to understand that defending the space of this freedom is not, perhaps, so little. After much labor, in the Second Vatican Council, the Church came to declare that “the human person has a right to religious freedom,” while it continues to profess Christianity as the only “true religion.” The recognition of religious freedom is not a sort of compromise, as if one were to say, “Since we were unable to convince mankind that Christianity is the true religion, let’s at least defend religious freedom.” No, the reason that pushed the Church to modify an approach that had been in place for many centuries was a deeper understanding of the nature of truth and of the path to reaching it: “The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth.” This was the firm belief of the Church in the first centuries, the great Christian revolution founded on the distinction between

the two cities, between God and Caesar. This belief was destined to weaken after the Edict of Thessalonica (380 AD), thanks to the emperor Theodosius. In a return to the patristic spirit, Vatican II could affirm that “all men are to be immune from coercion... in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” And finally, “This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right” (Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, December 7, 1965, 1,2). If this has to be said for the greatest value, then even more so for all of the others!

Only if Europe becomes a space of freedom, where each person can be immune from coercion, make his own human journey, and share it with those whom he finds on his path, will the interest be reawakened for dialogue, for an encounter in which each person offers the contribution of his experience in order to reach that “shared certainty” that is necessary for life in common.

Our desire is that Europe become a space of freedom for the encounter among seekers of truth. It is worth working for this. T

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