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UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI ALL'INCONTRO PROMOSSO DALLA FONDAZIONE "ROBERT SCHUMAN" PER LA COOPERAZIONE DEI DEMOCRATICI CRISTIANI D'EUROPA

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A fine mattinata, nella Sala Clementina del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha ricevuto in Udienza i partecipanti all'Incontro promosso dalla Fondazione "Robert Schuman" per la Cooperazione dei Democratici Cristiani d'Europa ed ha loro rivolto il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Mr President,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of this Seminar organized by the Robert Schuman Foundation. I offer a cordial greeting to all, and I express my special gratitude to Mr Jacques Santer who has voiced your sentiments of respect and esteem.

As Christians engaged in public life, you have come together to reflect on the prospects currently opening up before Europe. The "new" Europe now being built rightly wishes to become a solid and harmonious "edifice". This means finding a proper balance between the role of the Union and that of the member States, and between the unavoidable challenges which globalization presents to the continent and the respect of its historical and cultural distinctiveness, the national and religious identities of its people, and the specific contributions which can come from each member country. It also involves building an "edifice" which is welcoming to other countries, beginning with its closest neighbours, and a "house" open to forms of cooperation which are not only economic but also social and cultural.

2. For this to happen, it is necessary that Europe recognize and preserve its most cherished patrimony, made up of those values which have and continue to guarantee her a providential influence in the history of civilization. These values concern above all the dignity of the human person, the sacred character of human life, the central role of the family founded upon marriage, solidarity, subsidiarity, the rule of law and sound democracy.

Many cultural roots have helped to solidify these values, yet it is undeniable that Christianity has been the force able to promote, reconcile and consolidate them. For this reason it seems logical that the future European constitutional treaty, aimed at achieving "unity in diversity" (cf. *Preamble*, § 5), should make explicit mention of the Christian roots of the continent. A society forgetful of its past is exposed to the risk of not being able to deal with its present and – worse yet – of becoming the victim of its future!

In this regard, I am pleased to note that many of you come from countries preparing to enter the Union, countries for which Christianity often provided decisive assistance on the path towards freedom. From this standpoint you can also easily see how unjust it would be for today's Europe to conceal the pivotal contribution made by Christians to the downfall of oppressive regimes of whatever stripe and to the building of authentic democracy.

3. In my recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* I could not fail to emphasize, with sorrow, how this continent seems tragically to be suffering from a profound crisis of values (cf. No. 108), which has ultimately led to a crisis of identity.

Here I gladly point out how much can be done, from this standpoint, by means of a responsible and generous participation in "political" life and consequently in the many and varied economic, social and cultural activities which can be undertaken for the promotion of the common good in an organic and institutional manner. You are familiar with the words of my predecessor, Pope Paul VI in this regard: "*Politics are a demanding manner ... of living the Christian commitment to the service of others*" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 46).

The complaints often made against political activity do not justify an attitude of disengaged skepticism on the part of the Catholic, who instead has the duty of assuming responsibility for the well-being of society. It is not enough to call for the building of an just and fraternal society. There is also a need to work in a committed and competent way for the promotion of perennial human values in public life, in accordance with the correct methods proper to political activity.

4. The Christian must also ensure that the "salt" of his Christian commitment does not lose its "flavour" and that the "light" of his Gospel ideals does not become obscured by pragmatism or even worse by utilitarianism. For this reason he will need to deepen his knowledge of Christian social doctrine, striving to assimilate its principles and to apply it with wisdom where necessary.

This will assume a serious spiritual formation which is nourished by prayer. A superficial, spiritually lukewarm or indifferent person, or one excessively concerned with success and popularity, will never be able adequately to exercise his political responsibility.

Your Foundation can find in its namesake, Robert Schuman, a significant model for its inspiration. His political life was spent in the service of the fundamental values of freedom and solidarity, understood fully in the light of the Gospel.

5. Dear friends, in these days in which you are reflecting on Europe, it is natural to recall that among the principal promoters of the reunification of this continent were men inspired by profound Christian faith, like Adenauer, De Gaspari and Schuman. How can we underestimate, for example, the fact that, in 1951, before beginning the delicate negotiations which would lead to the adoption of the Treaty of Paris, they wished to meet in a Benedictine monastery on the Rhine for meditation and prayer?

You too have the responsibility not only of preserving and defending, but also of developing and reinforcing the spiritual and political heritage handed down by these great figures. In expressing this hope I cordially impart to you and your families my Apostolic Blessing.