

(English translation)

Innsbruck, Austria, November 9, 2001

**The spirit of brotherhood in politics,
key to the unity of Europe and of the world**

Address to the convention “*1000 cities for Europe*”

In the Focolare Movement, living out the “spirituality of unity or of communion,” has given origin, among other things, to a political expression known as the Movement for Unity, whose specific aim is that of promoting brotherhood in politics.

This political expression began in Naples in 1996, building on the experience of Italian politicians who, from the fifties, sought to live this ideal of unity. From what has been put into practice on different levels of political commitment, from the administration of cities to parliamentary activity, we can now derive some concrete indications which could be further developed and applied on a broader scale.

First of all, we saw that one can speak in terms of a true vocation to politics. It is a personal calling that emerges from circumstances and communicates through one’s conscience. Believers clearly discern the voice of God entrusting a task to them. But also non-believers feel called to politics by a social need, by a weak sector that is asking for help, by a violated human right, or by the desire to do something good for their city or for their nation.

And the response to a political vocation is first of all an act of brotherhood. In fact, one does not become politically active simply in order to resolve a problem; one acts upon public matters and deals with questions that are of concern to others, wanting their good as if it were their own.

When they live this way politicians have what it takes to listen attentively to citizens, to get to know their needs and resources. It helps them to understand the history of their city, to value its cultural patrimony and associations, to discern, little by little, its true vocation and to confidently mark out its future journey.

In reality, the task of this manner of “political love” is to create and preserve conditions which enable all other types of love to flourish: the love of young people who want to get married and who need a house and employment; the love of those who want to study and who need schools and books; the love of those who have their own businesses and who need roads and railways, clear and reliable rules.... Thus politics is the love of all loves, which gathers into the unity of a common design the resources of persons and groups and provides the means for each one to freely fulfill his or her own vocation.

Politics also fosters collaboration among all, bringing together needs and resources, the questions with the answers, instilling mutual trust among all. Politics can be compared to the stem of a flower which supports and nourishes the constant budding of petals in the community.

We all know that today there are citizens for whom the city hardly exists, citizens for whom the institutions find it hard to give answers. There are also those who feel excluded from the social fabric and separated from the political body because of a lack of employment, housing, or adequate health care. Citizens bring these and many other problems daily before whoever governs the city. The answers they receive dramatically influence their perception of themselves as full-fledged citizens, and consequently their desire and possibility of participating in social and political life.

From this point of view, then, the town or municipality is the most important institution because it is closer to the people and comes into direct contact with all types of needs. And it is through his or her relationship with the municipality, [in its various articulations] that a citizen develops a sense of gratitude – or resentment – towards the institutions as a whole, including more distant ones, like the federal government.

As for the national dimension of politics, the relationships between the main political currents which alternate in governing our countries, we note that living out our political choice as a vocation of love leads us to understand that others, who have made a political choice different from our own, can be motivated by an analogous vocation of love. They too – in their own way – are part of the same design, even when they become our political opponents. Brotherhood helps us recognize their task, to respect it, to help them to be faithful to it – even through constructive criticism – while we remain faithful to our own.

We should live brotherhood so well that we reach the point of loving the party of the other as we love our own, knowing that neither party was born by chance, but each as the answer to an historical need within the national community. And it is only by meeting all the needs, only by harmonizing them in a common design, that politics can reach its true goal. Brotherhood enhances the authentic values of each one and rebuilds the whole of the political design of a nation.

The initiatives of the members of the Movement for Unity bear witness to this. Seeking to create a spirit of brotherhood between the majority and the opposition, in Parliament and in various municipalities, their initiatives have been translated into laws of the State or into local policies that have brought unity to the cities in which they have been enacted.

Numerous experiences with regard to welcoming immigrants bear witness to this. These people pour into the more industrialized countries not only for economic reasons, but also for political reasons: a city or nation does not lose in being open to others; on the contrary, it gains. Its political stature is upgraded in offering a country and citizenship to people who have lost their own. Love for our country makes us understand the love of others for their country which has its own design of love.

Those who respond to their political vocation by practicing brotherhood enter into a universal dimension which gives them a view open to all humanity. They are mindful of the universal consequences of their choices. They discern whether their decisions, while serving the interests of their nation, are detrimental to others. In this way, each political act, not only that of a national government, but also the most detailed and specific choices carried out in the smallest municipality of the most distant province, assumes a universal significance, because the politician who implements it is fully human and fully responsible. Politicians of unity love the country of others as they love their own.

This is the characteristic of the political dimension of being citizens: the constant relationship with others, the acknowledgement of their being distinct from me, but, at the same time, the conviction of belonging together to the city. And this too is characteristic of Europe. In fact, when we began to speak of Europe, we did so in relation to the city.

Down through the centuries the perception of what Europe is grew deeper, at the same time as its borders widened. From little Greece, Europe would eventually see itself as extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. This was possible mainly because of the penetration of Christianity which instilled religious principles in the “geographic” peoples of Europe. And, developing into civic, social and political principles, this would build up the cultural Europe. All this without suffocating the distinct identities of cities and nations which were gradually being formed.

We find the same situation at every epoch passage: what we thought to be Europe, at a given moment proved to be too small. Forced to deal with something that was different, that put it in crisis, Europe was challenged to understand this new element, to take it in, modifying it and modifying itself.

In doing so, Europe continued to advance more and more towards its true self, towards the full maturation of the seed of Christianity which is no longer expressed in the “Christianity” of the Middle Ages, but more profoundly, in the dynamics of universal brotherhood, involving different peoples and nations.

The vocation of Europe lies in this universal brotherhood which creates unity while maintaining the distinctions. It is still on its way. The wars, the totalitarian regimes, the injustices, have left open

wounds in need of healing. But to be Europeans truly, we must succeed in looking at the past with mercy, acknowledging as our own the history of my own nation as that of the other, recognizing that what we are today is the fruit of a common happening, of a European destiny that asks to be taken entirely and knowingly into our hands.

Today, the unity of Europe asks European politicians to interpret the signs of the times, and to formulate, as it were, a pact of brotherhood with one another, a pact which commits them to consider themselves as members of Europe as they are members of their own nation, always seeking what unites and together finding solutions to the problems that are still stumbling blocks to the unity of all Europe. Certainly, it is worthwhile devoting our lives to such a lofty goal. It is what I wish for you, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for your attention.