

POPE CHALLENGES EUROPEANS

Pope Francis' address to the European Parliament was one of his signature statements. He beckoned his audience to recover their religious moorings, focusing on the positive link between Christianity and Europe. This means an appreciation of what he called the "transcendent dignity" of the human person. Dignity is given recognition in the respect for inalienable human rights, and this, he stressed, extends to the right to profess one's faith.

The communal aspects of Catholic thought were evident in the way Pope Francis addressed liberty. We are not "monads," or disconnected atoms, nor are we "absolutes"; rather, we are "beings in relation." Sounding very much like his two predecessors, he said, "unless the rights of each individual are harmoniously ordered to the greater good, those rights will end up being considered limitless and consequently will become a source of conflicts and violence."

Speaking of violence, the Holy Father spoke out against Christian persecution. In an obvious reference to Muslims, he said, "Communities and individuals today find themselves subjected to barbaric acts of violence: they are evicted from their homes and native lands, sold as slaves, killed, beheaded, crucified or burned alive, under the shameful and complicit silence of so many."

Pope Francis also condemned "selfish lifestyles" and the Western "throwaway culture." But he did not lash out against a market economy. Instead, he called for a balance between the pursuit of profit and the needs of workers. We need to find "new ways of joining market flexibility with the need for stability and security on the part of workers."

Furthermore, we should embrace the Christian contribution to the "social and cultural formation" of Europe, he said, and

not see it as a “threat to the secularity” of nations or the independence of its institutions.

Pope Francis has given many significant statements. This one is Bill Donohue’s favorite, thus far.