



Speech of the General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union in the context of the EPP Group Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions, Vienna 9 December 2022

Honourable members of the European Parliament,
Religious and civil authorities,
Dear friends,

As in previous occasions, it is always an honour and a pleasure to be invited and to participate in the Annual Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue meeting organized by the EPP Group. This year we have arrived to its XXIV edition. As Secretary General of COMECE, but also on behalf of our President, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich sj. and the European Bishops, I have to say that the presence and work of this unit of the EPP group in the European Parliament is extremely valuable and important for the Catholic Church. We congratulate the EPP group for creating this unit and supporting it and hope that in the future it will continue receiving full support and the necessary resources.

I am going to do today a thing one normally does not do in a panel like ours, and it is to read a speech by the former Nunzio to the European Union, **Mgr. Aldo Giordano**. I will explain why I do this and I think I will have your understanding and approval. Mons. Aldo Giordano, before being appointed Nunzio to the EU in May 2021, had been Secretary General of the Council of the Bishops' Conference of Europe (CCEE) for many years, and then Apostolic Observer to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and finally Apostolic Nunzio in Venezuela. He knew very well Europe, and also, due to his stay in Venezuela, was acquainted with South America and geopolitical issues. He was also an expert in the German philosopher Nietzsche. He took office as Nunzio before

the European Union in August 2021 and unfortunately was infected by Covid in the Eucharistic Congress in Budapest which we attended together, and died a year ago, the 2 of December 2021. I want to remember him today, pay homage to him, in this first anniversary of his sad death, with an important speech he wrote for a gathering organized by the Jesuits in Namur, called “Passion for Europe” which he could not attend due to the illness. This short and beautiful speech, that is considered by many his spiritual testament, justly addresses the issue we are discussing today, **Religion and the future of Europe**, and does so much better that I could do and with the authority of the last words of a religious person that new well Europe and the world.

I pass, then, to read his speech.

The title he gave to his speech is: **The future of Europe, the responsibility of the Church and Christianity**. Date 25 September 2021.

Dear friends, participants in the Passion for Europe session, I would have liked to be with you, but the virus forced me to change my plans. However, I do not want to give up sending you a greeting. I worked on European issues for about 20 years, from 1995 to 2013. Now I have returned to our Europe after more than seven years of service as Apostolic Nuncio to Venezuela and, having arrived in Brussels at the beginning of last August, I am trying to rediscover what our continent looks like today and what the responsibilities of the Church and Christianity are for its future. I am sure that your meeting these days and the topics you are addressing with such highly competent people will be a significant contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. In my brief intervention, I propose that we take a step back from the problems of the day to try to think about **two fundamental questions** that seem to me essential for the future of Europe.

1. The first fundamental question that is decisive for the future of Europe is that of God. It is presented in a dramatic and lucid way in a famous page

by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, entitled *The Fool*, in the book: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, *The gay (joyful) science*, n.125. "Have you not heard of the madman who, in broad daylight, lit a lantern and ran around the public square shouting: "I am looking for God! I am looking for God! - As there were many who did not believe in God, his cry caused great hilarity. Has he been lost?" said one. "Or has he hidden himself?" "Has he emigrated? - so they shouted and laughed in a jumble. The madman jumped into their midst and glared at them. Where has God gone?" he cried, "I want to tell you! We killed him, you and I! We are all his murderers! After this announcement a series of questions: But how did we do this? ... What did we do when we detached this earth from the chain of its sun? Are we not falling all the time? Forward, backward, sideways, all around? Is there still an above and a below? Do we not wander as if through an infinite nothingness? Is it not colder? Do you not see the night coming all the time, more night?" ... God is dead! God remains dead! And it is we who have killed him! How shall we, the murderers of murderers, console ourselves? It is said that this madman entered different churches on the same day and sang his *Requiem æternam deo*. When he was expelled and questioned, he answered the same thing over and over again: "What are these churches for, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?"

The madman has a first surprise in store for us: lighting a lantern when there is full morning light. **Even the European man today is beginning to feel the need to light a lantern at the very moment when everything seems clear.** Even the clarity inherited from the Enlightenment no longer seems sufficient. Man is searching for God, for truth, even if in the "European market" there are people who seem to snub the problem or at least show indifference. The dramatic news of this madman is that of a murder: God himself has been killed and the people responsible are the European men, who have started to live "as if God did not exist". European man decides to "become like God" by walking autonomously,

in solitude, with self-sufficiency. If God is dead, the sun, truth, love, beauty, in absolute terms, no longer exist. Everything becomes relative to man and his radical completion. If the sun exists, there is a source, a perspective, an objective, absolute interpretative point of view to look at and draw from; if there is no sun, there remains the anarchic pluralism of perspectives and interpretations. Each person becomes a sun to himself. Instead of one sun, a myriad of "lonely" suns. If the absolute is missing, man always falls into the temptation to absolutize something else: himself, a science, an ideology, a group. If God does not exist, each individual, each science, each group can claim to be God, to have the truth and to be the measure of all things. If there is a Transcendence, all human powers and all claims to exclusive truth are relativised. Only the reference to God can relativise the powers of the earth and prevent them from being proposed as absolute.

2. The second question I would like to ask is related **to geopolitics and is the urgent need to have a horizon**. Being in Venezuela, I confirmed the question of Europe's global role. Often, when faced with a problem, we have this attitude: we study the problem, we discuss the problem, we attack the problem, we want to solve the problem... and in this way the problem comes closer and closer to our eyes and becomes more and more amplified, until it covers the entire horizon of our gaze. The problem becomes the only thing that exists. The horizon closes and the light disappears. On the other hand, if we know how to move the problem away from our eyes and place it within the horizon, the problem first shrinks and becomes relativised, becoming part of the network to which it belongs. In this way, our gaze is not exclusively blocked by the problem and remains free to see where the roots of the problem really are and where the possible solutions are. Often, the roots of the problem are not within the problem, but are elsewhere in the network, and there is where we must act. Above all, we can still see the faces of other people who can

contribute to solving the problem, by getting us out of the solitude. "He who has no horizon overestimates and exaggerates what is closest to him", said the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer. The horizon of the problems we face is the whole world. We cannot isolate our countries from the whole world. In the face of globalisation and the universality of problems, **there is an urgent need for people who are able to consider the universal brotherhood of the human family.** We must also remember that the horizon is above all the point where the earth meets the sky. This is the horizon that draws the light for historical action. Pope Francis, especially with the encyclicals "Laudato sì" and "Fratelli tutti", invites us to keep the horizon open. In order to have light on the future of Europe, we must always keep in mind the complexity of the problems. The theme of the environment is not only scientific and technical, but also economic, social, political, cultural and religious, which is why it belongs to the Church's social doctrine. Today, the demand for a Europe of defence is becoming strong, but the horizon of defence is peace. When we talk about defence, I would always expect an explicit reference to peace, to Europe's responsibility not only to defend itself and its values, but to promote peace in the world, in the face of the tragic and too many "pieces of war" that hurt the peoples of the planet. I am convinced that Europe could play a fundamental and unique role in building peace. At all levels, Europe has the strength to mediate between small and large powers to find ways of reconciliation in the face of violence. I am thinking of Venezuela, for example. It is clear that in Venezuela a global geopolitical game is being played, especially for the country's wealth, with politically opposed fronts. Who could have the strength to bring nations like Russia and the United States to the table for the sake of the suffering Venezuelan people? Would it not be the European Union? Wouldn't the greater autonomy that the European Union is seeking to gain be devoted to this task? Wouldn't this be the best defence strategy, even in the face of destabilisation attempts? If **Europe aimed to be a peacemaker in the world**, it would

recover the vocation inscribed in its roots and the soul and ideal of which the venerable Robert Schuman spoke. Together, it would arouse a special interest in the world of young people, who today are all seeking to recover the cause of the Union. In short, it seems to me that Europe must rediscover the talent of Christianity, which has been tempted to bury.

These then, dear friends, the words of Mons. Aldo Giordano. Religion forms part of the identity of Europe and can and should contribute to its future, especially, in the two ways Mons. Giordano has indicated in its speech: making present the reality of God that frees us from the dictatorship of relativism and contributing to making Europe an agent of peace in the world, by keeping the horizon open, through the message and witness of human fraternity and, when the times are right, offering ways of reconciliation through peacebuilding initiatives with local communities, even through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

General Secretary of COMECE