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LECTIO MAGISTRALIS

by H.E.R. Card. Robert Sarah

"EUROPE AND AFRICA. IN DIALOGUE WITH CARD. ROBERT SARAH"

1. Logos, word and opposed worldviews

Mr President,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Friends of ProVita and Famiglia,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the invitation to share with you, in this house of the peoples of Europe, some reflections that I hold dear as a son of Africa and as a pastor of the Catholic Church. I do not come to you with a ceremonial address, but with a question I consider decisive for the future of our two continents: can we still understand one another? Do the words we use — "human rights", "dignity", "development", "freedom", "health", "gender", "family" — still mean the same thing for those who pronounce them in Brussels, in Strasbourg, in Kampala or in Conakry?

Pope Leo XIV, receiving last January the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, uttered a sentence which I would like to set forth as the key to reading my whole reflection today. The Pope stated: "We need words to express once again, unequivocally, certain realities. Only in this way can an authentic dialogue, free of misunderstandings, resume"¹. He tells us that the crisis we are going through — a geopolitical crisis, a crisis of rights, a crisis of multilateralism — is, at its root, beyond language: it is a crisis of the logos, of reason.

In the dossier prepared for this meeting, which I have studied carefully, it emerges with documented clarity how, in the relationship between the European Union and Africa, words are today used not to reveal reality, but to conceal it or even to invert it². People speak of "sexual and reproductive health" and mean, in many cases, access to abortion. People speak of "gender equality" and mean, at times, the deconstruction of the sexual difference between man and woman inscribed in the body of the human being. People speak of "human rights" for African

countries, and mean the imposition of juridical categories alien to our history, to our faith, to our culture, to our anthropological vision. If words no longer mean what they say, how can there be authentic dialogue? How can Africa trust a Europe which speaks with equivocal, double-meaning words?

This is not a matter of academic semantics: it is a political problem, a problem of truth, of honesty in human relations, of the first importance. A treaty, a resolution, an action plan which use an imprecise and ambiguous vocabulary are not instruments of cooperation, but instruments of perversion and of silent power, of cultural and economic neo-colonialism: those who control the meaning of words control, de facto, the outcome of the negotiation, without the other party even realising it. This is exactly what is happening and what, in this *Lectio*, I shall seek to illuminate in the light of the Gospel and of reason³.

I would like to connect this diagnosis to a text which I consider of extraordinary timeliness: the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which Pope Leo XIV signed last May. In it the Pontiff denounces the use of a technical, manipulative and deceiving language — conceived for the age of artificial intelligence, but applicable, I believe, to many spheres of international cooperation — which risks reducing the human person to statistical categories of economic powers, instead of recognising him as a free subject endowed with transcendent dignity⁴. Leo XIV asks for a thought, to use his words, "dynamic and faithful to the Gospel", capable of safeguarding the truth of the person even when the techniques of power — economic, juridical, communicative — seek to rewrite it for their own purposes⁵. The Encyclical tells us that the question is still and always anthropological.

Here, then, is the first invitation I would like to extend: let us return to speaking according to the truth of the person, of the family, of peoples, also and above all in the context of the cooperation between the European Union and Africa.

Benedict XVI and the primacy of the logos

To grasp fully this crisis of words, we must go back to a deeper source: the crisis of reason itself. And here I must pay tribute to the prophetic lucidity of the great Pope Benedict XVI, who

was the first, in three memorable addresses, to diagnose the evil that we see today unfolding in its fullness.

At Regensburg, in September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI recalled that the Christian God acts, to use the Greek expression of the Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1348-1425) which he commented on, "σὺν λόγῳ", with logos⁶. Logos — the Pope explained — means both reason and word. A creative reason, capable of communicating itself precisely as reason⁷. "Not to act in accordance with reason, not to act with the logos, is contrary to God's nature", he wrote, citing the Byzantine emperor⁸. A consequence follows which I would like to underline with force before this assembly: a reason which, faced with the divine, becomes deaf and relegates religion to the sphere of private subcultures, becomes itself incapable — these are still Benedict's words — of taking part in the dialogue of cultures⁹.

Let us apply this principle to the theme of "rights" which today so occupies our European debates. When Europe builds up rights detached from the truth about man — abortion which some would like to elevate to a "fundamental right", sexual identity reduced to pure subjective self-production — reason itself is distorted: from an instrument of knowledge of the truth it becomes an instrument of power, capable of imposing itself by the force of law and money on those who do not share those premises.

Pope Benedict XVI added, still at Regensburg, that a reason deaf to the divine becomes incapable of authentic intercultural dialogue, because it claims to impose itself as the only possible rational culture, relegating every other vision of man — beginning with the Christian one and that of the great African religious traditions — to the rank of superstition to be corrected¹⁰. This is why, when today a package of ideological conditionality is presented as synonymous with "modernity" or "progress", we should recognise in it not the broadening, but the narrowing of reason.

Two years later, at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out to Europe the path of *quaerere Deum*: "to seek God and to allow ourselves to be found by Him: this is no less necessary today than it was in past times", he told the representatives of French culture¹¹. And he added a warning that, read today, sounds almost prophetic: "A purely positivist culture which relegated to the subjective field, as unscientific, the question about God, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities"¹². Christianity, the Pope

further explained on that occasion, perceives in human words the Word, the Logos itself: words, for a Christian, are never mere instruments, but participate in the truth they communicate¹³.

Three years later still, at the German Bundestag, Pope Benedict XVI brought this reflection into the very heart of European legislative practice. "Where positivist reason considers itself the only sufficient culture, relegating all other cultural realities to the status of subcultures, it diminishes man, indeed it threatens his humanity"¹⁴. And he asked, before the German legislators: "How can reason recover its greatness without slipping into the irrational?"¹⁵. This is exactly the question I would like to put to you today, Honourable parliamentarians: a European legislation that claims to be "neutral" towards every anthropological vision, but which in fact imposes throughout the world — by way of treaties, aid, commercial conditionalities — a specific and contestable vision of man, is it not slipping precisely into that irrationality against which Pope Benedict XVI warned us? From these three great addresses arises the bridge that I want to build towards today's theme: the critique of those forms of "ideological colonisation" that use international law and European or international funding to impose questionable and contestable anthropological visions on peoples who have not chosen them¹⁶.

The three Popes and ideological colonisation

This primacy of the logos, threatened by juridical and economic positivism, finds its most direct and most painful application precisely in the question of gender ideology. It was again Benedict XVI who, in his last Christmas address to the Roman Curia, in December 2012, offered us the theological key to understanding it. Citing the reflections of the then Chief Rabbi of France, Gilles Bernheim, the Pope recalled how Simone de Beauvoir had written: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" — and commented: "man denies having a nature pre-constituted by his corporeity, which characterises the human being as man or as woman [...] He denies his own nature and decides that it is not given to him as a pre-constituted fact, but that he himself creates it"¹⁷. And he drew a severe conclusion: "Where the freedom to do becomes freedom to make oneself, one necessarily arrives at denying the Creator himself"¹⁸. "Whoever defends God — Benedict concluded — defends man"¹⁹.

This theological key allows us to read in depth categories such as S.O.G.I. (sexual orientation and gender identity), C.S.R.H.E. (comprehensive sexual and reproductive health

education), which recur with such insistence in the treaties between the European Union and the African countries²⁰. These are not neutral categories: they are the political and juridical application of that very negation of given nature, of that very refusal of the Creator, of which Benedict spoke to us.

Notice, Honourable parliamentarians and dear friends, how these categories do not appear in isolation in a single document, but are repeated systematically — in parliamentary resolutions, in commercial protocols, in sectoral action plans — until they constitute what we can rightly call a veritable system²¹. A system does not come about by chance: it arises from a coherent worldview, which is precisely that secularised and irrational vision, in the most technical sense of the term — contrary to the logos — which I described at the outset.

Pope Francis, for his part, gave to this system, to this phenomenon, a name that has by now entered common usage: "ideological colonisation". At the meeting with families in Manila, in January 2015, he said in words that deserve to be listened to again in full: "Let us be attentive to the new ideological colonisations. There exist ideological colonisations which seek to destroy the family [...] They are not born [...] from prayer, from encounter with God [...] they come from outside, and for this reason I say they are colonisations"²². A few days later, in the press conference on the return flight, Francis was even more explicit, recalling the complaints of the African bishops gathered in Synod: "This is ideological colonisation: they enter into a people with an idea that has nothing to do with the people [...] it is the same thing that, for certain loans, certain conditions are imposed"²³.

This magisterial framework — Benedict XVI, Francis and Leo XIV — I would now like to apply, in three stages, to three great themes: the dignity of the person and religious freedom; the self-determination of peoples; Africa and its relations with Europe and with the Church.

The dignity of the human person and religious freedom

1. Ontological principle: the dignity of the person and the logos

Let us begin from the foundation of everything: the dignity of the human person. *Magnifica Humanitas* — whose very title is already a programme — reminds us that the human person, created by God, is precisely "magnificent", irreducible to a statistical datum, to a productive

function, to a changing subjective preference²⁴. Every social, economic, technological order — the encyclical insists — must be judged from this dignity and from the person's vocation to communion with God, not the other way round²⁵.

From this ontological principle there flows, as its first and most radical consequence, religious freedom. It is not a right among others, added alongside other rights: it is, as Pope Leo XIV recalled precisely in the cited address to the Diplomatic Corps, the root of every other freedom, because it concerns the constitutive relationship of man with the truth and with God²⁶. To deny it, to restrict it, or, worse, to manipulate it for the purposes of foreign policy, is to strike man at the very heart of his dignity.

It is not without significance that Pope Leo XIV wished to link his first encyclical explicitly to the social magisterium of Pope Leo XIII²⁷. *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891, defended the family, work, the right of association, presenting the Church as the guarantor of an integral vision of man against the ideologies of the century — then socialist collectivism and individualist liberalism, today, I believe, economic technocracy and gender ideology²⁸. This continuity between the two Pontiffs is not accidental: it tells us that the dignity of the person, even before being an axiological principle — a value to be promoted — is an ontological principle: a datum of being, which no parliamentary majority, no international treaty, has the power to redefine.

This distinction between the ontological and the axiological is not a technicality of the theological school: it is the keystone of my whole intervention. If dignity were only a value, it could be negotiated, balanced, suspended in the name of other competing values — economic efficiency, geopolitical stability, electoral consensus. But if dignity is an ontological datum, it precedes every political deliberation and judges it: no parliament, European or African, creates it; every parliament worthy of the name has the task of recognising and protecting it.

Abortion and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights [SRHR]: from the right to life to the alleged right to suppress

It is precisely on this ontological terrain that one of the gravest reversals of the logos is being consummated in our day. In June and July 2022, the European Parliament adopted resolutions asking the Commission and the Member States to "give priority to universal access to safe and

legal abortion" in the external relations of the Union, and proposing to include abortion among the fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter of the European Union²⁹.

Here the reversal of the logos or of reason reaches its most dramatic point: the lack of access to abortion is defined as "violence", while the conceived — the weakest, the most innocent among us — is deprived of any word, of any representation, of any right³⁰. The words "health", "rights", "freedom" then cease to indicate certain realities, to use again the expression of Pope Leo XIV, and become rhetoric at the service of the suppression of the weakest³¹. It is not one opinion among many: it is the most radical possible negation of the ontological principle I have just recalled — because it denies, at the root, that the conceived is a person, even the mere hypothesis that it could truly be so.

I would like to add a consideration that concerns religious freedom directly. A juridical system that raises abortion to a fundamental right in treaties and in external relations, and that claims to make cooperation with third countries conditional upon it, in fact obliges States, religious communities, health-care and educational personnel to conform to a vision of man incompatible with their convictions of faith. This is not neutrality: it is imposition and unacceptable oppression. It is imposing by juridical and financial means a specific anthropology on communities that do not share it, constituting, in the proper sense, a violation of religious freedom and of freedom of conscience — that very freedom which Pope Leo XIV reminded us is the root of every other freedom³².

It is worth recalling that the juridical order of many African countries still guards, within its constitutional law, an explicit link between the dignity of the person and the protection of nascent life; a link which Europe, in many of its legal systems, has instead severed. The Constitution of Kenya, at Article 26, establishes that "the life of a person begins at conception"³³. That of Uganda, at Article 22, provides that "no person has the right to terminate the life of an unborn child except as may be authorised by law"³⁴. This is not a backward remnant: it is, rather, a fragment of juridical wisdom, rooted both in natural law and in African religious traditions, which the West would do well to reconsider rather than correct. Not by chance, this very year, the Court of Appeal of Kenya has firmly reaffirmed this constitutional principle, rejecting the interpretation that sought to make abortion a fundamental right³⁵. Here is a concrete example of what I mean when I speak of the self-determination of peoples, in accordance with the dignity of

the person: a continent which, though poor in material means, has not lost the memory of what a human being is.

Gender, education and the rewritten person

The third moment of this reversal concerns education, the place par excellence in which a civilisation transmits to the new generations the truth about itself. Article 40.6 of the Africa Protocol of the Samoa Agreement — the framework agreement which today regulates relations between the European Union and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific — requires partner governments to guarantee access to "comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education" (CSRHE), with explicit reference to international technical guidelines on sexuality education³⁶. The European Union's "Gender Action Plan III", for its part, imposes an approach declared to be "gender-transformative" and establishes that at least 85% of the Union's new external actions must integrate gender equality objectives³⁷.

Here we can apply directly Pope Benedict XVI's critique of gender ideology which I have recalled: education becomes the laboratory in which children are taught to consider their own sexual identity as purely fluid and self-determined, detached from the body, from family history, from relationship; against that logos of creation of which Pope Ratzinger spoke at Regensburg, in Paris, in Berlin³⁸. We must not fear to call things by their name, as Pope Leo XIV asks of us: when a technical "protocol", or an "action plan", imposes on a whole continent a single educational model on human sexuality, without real consultation of the peoples concerned, we are again in the presence of that ideological and oppressive colonisation, denounced many times dramatically by Pope Francis³⁹.

It manifests itself here in the use of educational programmes and conditioned aid to penetrate the cultural fabric of African countries, redefining the person and the family according to secularised Western standards that do not belong to the history of those peoples⁴⁰. Well then, Honourable parliamentarians, I ask, with respect but with equal firmness, that the words "man", "woman", "marriage", "family" not be reduced to social constructs manipulable at the whim of the ideological fashions of the moment, but be guarded as ontological data of reality, of a reality created and not self-produced by man, and, for the believer, as data of biblical revelation. This is

precisely what Pope Leo XIV means when he asks that words return to expressing certain realities⁴¹.

The self-determination of peoples

Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations places among the very purposes of the Organisation the development of friendly relations among nations founded on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples⁴². The OECD principles [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] on the effectiveness of development aid, recalled in the dossier, reaffirm that international cooperation must align itself with the priorities defined by the recipient countries, and not impose them from outside⁴³.

From this principle a consequence follows which I would like to underline with clarity: respect for the religious and cultural history of a people — all the more praiseworthy the more it protects the family, life, the transmission of the faith — is not an obstacle to development, as is sometimes insinuated in the corridors of Brussels, but an elementary requirement of justice⁴⁴. The dignity of the person and religious freedom also have a communal and historical dimension: a people has the right to live, to guard and to transmit its own religious, cultural and family tradition, just as the individual person has the right to profess his own faith.

It is perhaps not superfluous to recall, in this venue, that Christianity is not for Africa a recent importation nor a residue of European colonialism, as is sometimes insinuated in certain secularised circles. Long before Europe evangelised sub-Saharan Africa in modern times, North Africa and the Horn of Africa had already given to the universal Church some of its greatest teachers: Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, and, above all, Augustine of Hippo, whose reflection on the relationship between faith and reason nourished for centuries theology and the entire Western culture, including, not by chance, Pope Benedict XVI himself. Ethiopia preserves an uninterrupted Christian tradition since the fourth century. When, therefore, we speak of the religious self-determination of the African peoples, we are not defending a "tribal particularism", opposed to an alleged European universalism: we are defending the freedom of a continent that has contributed, from the origins, to shaping that very Christian logos of which Europe today risks losing the memory. This overturns, if we think about it well, the implicit narrative of a certain development cooperation, which treats Africa as a perpetual learner and Europe as a

definitive teacher: the history of the Church tells us, on the contrary, that the gift of faith has always been reciprocal, and that Africa has as much to give back as it has received.

Pope Benedict XVI, once again at the Bundestag, offers us here a decisive category: that of "ecology of man" and of natural law, a law that precedes positive political power and judges it from outside⁴⁵. "Law is not the pure product of the legislator's will, but must recognise a truth about man and about society that no parliament can decree at its pleasure"⁴⁶. No power, however rich or influential, can claim to redefine for other peoples the very meaning of "human rights", against their moral and religious conscience. To do so is not to promote human rights: it is to deny their foundation, which is precisely the dignity of every people to be subject, and not object, of its own history.

I would like to add, to this principle, a second cornerstone of the social doctrine of the Church that well illuminates our theme: the principle of subsidiarity. John Paul II, in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, recalled that a society of a higher order must never substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of the communities of a lower order, depriving them of their competences, but must rather sustain them in case of necessity and help them to coordinate their action with that of the other social components, in view of the common good⁴⁷. Applied to international relations, this principle tells us that the European Union, however animated by good intentions, does not have the task of rewriting from the outside the family law, the criminal law, the educational systems of sovereign African States: it has rather the task of supporting them, when they request it, in the achievement of their own legitimate ends. The overturning of this order — the pretension, that is, that the higher, supranational order should discipline in the smallest details the moral and family life of peoples — is not subsidiarity, but its exact opposite: it is an ideological centralisation, which the social doctrine of the Church has always condemned, from whatever quarter it comes.

Africa: the needs, the trials and the contribution required of the West and of the Church

1. The European Union's conditionality system

We must acknowledge that there exists a "three-level" system through which the principle of self-determination is — in fact — circumvented⁴⁸. At the normative level are the resolutions of the European Parliament that I have already recalled on abortion and LGBT+ rights⁴⁹. At the second level, the juridical-conventional one, is the Samoa Agreement, which contains a supremacy clause capable of conditioning the whole framework of relations between the European Union and the *African Caribbean and Pacific group of States*⁵⁰. At the third level, the financial and commercial one, are the Neighbourhood, Development Cooperation and International Cooperation Instrument [NDICI], the proposal COM(2025)0551 now under discussion, and the preferential trade regimes⁵¹.

A concrete case well illustrates how these three levels are welded together: that of Uganda⁵². With the resolution of 20 April 2023, the European Parliament asked the Commission to use all available diplomatic, juridical and financial means to dissuade the Ugandan President from promulgating the law approved by the Parliament of that country and, in the event of promulgation, to consider the withdrawal of the trade preferences granted to Uganda under the "Everything But Arms" regime, to activate the "essential elements" clause of the Cotonou Agreement and to consider the Union's global human rights sanctions regime; the Parliament also called for a Union strategy for the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality⁵³. I say this with sober but firm language: here appears in a complete and verifiable form the "ideological colonisation", the use of trade and finance to intervene in the criminal and family legislation of a sovereign State, frontally violating the principle of self-determination of peoples⁵⁴.

The proposed regulation COM(2025)0551, currently under discussion, foresees an overall allocation of 200.3 billion euros at current prices for the Union's external action, with an indicative allocation for sub-Saharan Africa more than doubled compared to the guaranteed minimum of the current cycle — from 29.18 to about 60.5 billion euros. The language on the Beijing Platform, on ICPD, on sexual and reproductive health and on comprehensive sexuality education is maintained in the base text and reproduced in the sectoral pillars of European

intervention, while the previous binding quantitative targets are replaced by a transversal "mainstreaming" approach: the ideological conditionality does not disappear, it becomes more capillary and less measurable⁵⁵. It is here that I would like to recall once more *Magnifica Humanitas*: technology and economic power, Pope Leo's Encyclical reminds us, become instruments of domination and perverse oppression when they are not regulated by charity and by justice⁵⁶. The Church is not asking Europe to stop helping Africa — quite the contrary — but is asking that what is the "culture of power" be transformed into "civilisation of love"⁵⁷.

Voices and sufferings of Africa, the role of the Church and of the West

Allow me now to give voice, in this so symbolic place, to those who have no voice: the Africans themselves. The dossier gathers direct testimonies of African government officials who denounce the European Union's insistence on categories such as SOGI [*Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*] in the negotiations, faced with the systematic European refusal to discuss themes equally urgent for Africa, such as the restitution of colonial artefacts; others speak openly of a "fait accompli", summarised in the formula: "If you do not sign, there are consequences"⁵⁸. These are not my words: they are words gathered by independent academic analyses and by direct witnesses, and they tell us that the diagnosis of a cultural neo-colonialism is not political-ecclesiastical propaganda, but an experience lived by those who sit on the other side of the negotiating table⁵⁹.

It is not surprising, then, that in May 2025, in Entebbe, Uganda, African parliamentarians and institutional representatives gathered, in a conference inaugurated by President Museveni, to propose an African Charter for the family and cultural sovereignty. President Museveni declared on that occasion, referring explicitly to the Samoa Agreement: "I urge you to study that Samoa document that speaks of all these things you are discussing: if it really contains what is said about reproductive rights, then we shall have to withdraw from that absurdity, and tell the European Union that we cannot be part of that iniquity"⁶⁰. Harsh words, which reveal a substance to be taken seriously: the dignity of peoples who no longer wish to be treated as minors under guardianship, but as moral subjects, capable of saying "no" to what contradicts their vision of the person and of the family.

But it would be unfair, on my part, to limit myself to denunciation. Pope Benedict XVI, in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus*, clearly indicated what Africa legitimately expects from the West and from the Church: not an ideological interference, but an authentic solidarity in reconciliation, in justice and in peace, capable of accompanying without substituting itself, and of giving without pretending to remould the soul of peoples in its own image⁶¹.

This means, concretely, a renewed commitment to debt relief, to the transfer of technologies useful for health and agriculture, to support for the school and health networks that the Catholic Church has managed for centuries throughout the continent, often in substitution for the State, and to the common struggle against corruption and misgovernment, which weigh on the African peoples as much as external interferences. It also means, for the Church of the West, rediscovering in Africa not a mission field to be assisted, but a living source of faith, of vocations, of numerous and joyful families, from which Europe, aged and tired, has much to learn and to receive.

As a son of Africa, I want to add a word of my own. I have many times denounced, and I repeat today in this venue, the will of certain powers to impose false values through political and financial arguments: in some African countries, veritable ministries dedicated to gender theory have been created in exchange for economic support⁶². I have also recalled, when a Secretary-General of the United Nations came to Africa to ask for the decriminalisation of homosexuality as a condition of civilisation, that one cannot impose on the poor this kind of absurdity, while hospitals, schools, drinkable water are lacking⁶³. The material poverty of Africa does not take away its dignity, nor its right — indeed it gives it perhaps a stronger title — to judge for itself what is good for its own children.

In 2015, during the Synod on the family, I said, and I do not retract today a single word, that gender ideology and Islamic fundamentalism represent, each in its own way, two "apocalyptic beasts", threatening to destroy not only the family, but man himself, image of God⁶⁴. Some judged the image excessive; I continue to believe it grasps something true: both these forces, though very different in origin and form, share the pretension of rewriting man according to their own liking — one in the name of an alleged progress, the other in the name of an alleged return to an original purity — denying in every case that religious freedom and that dignity of the person which I have placed at the centre of this *Lectio*.

I would like to conclude by sharing a deeper conviction, matured in so many years of service to the Church: the crisis of the Church in the West and the crisis of the West itself are, at bottom, the same crisis. It is because the Church in many European nations has lost her own identity, her prophetic voice, that the West itself has lost the sense of its own civilisation⁶⁵. And I add: even in the West, today, religious freedom is threatened⁶⁶. Here the three Popes I have evoked in this Lectio intertwine into a single testimony: Pope Benedict XVI defends the ecology of man and of the family, against juridical positivism; Pope Francis denounces the ideological colonisations and invites to an authentic intercultural dialogue; Pope Leo XIV asks that words return to expressing certain realities and proposes a multilateralism purified from ideologies⁶⁷. An appeal that I address, with respect but without reservations, to Europe and to the Church of the West: make a serious examination of conscience. Listen to Africa. Respect its cultural sovereignty. Offer a free cooperation, not conditioned by ideological agendas. Be willing to receive from Africa what it can still offer to a tired West: the testimony of a living faith and of a sense of the family, which can help Europe itself to rediscover its own logos.

Conclusion: Returning to the logos and to certain realities

Honourable parliamentarians, allow me to conclude where I began: with the words of Pope Leo XIV. Without words that return to indicating certain realities, the Holy Father told us, there is no authentic dialogue⁶⁸, even within the Catholic Church. And I add: without logos, diplomacy and international cooperation degenerate into a game of force disguised as technical language. I would then like to invite the whole European Parliament and the representatives present here, to a true examination of language: to say with clarity, without diplomatic ambiguities, what is really meant when speaking of "human rights", of "sexual and reproductive health", of "gender", of "family", and to ask oneself, with intellectual honesty, whether these definitions truly respect the dignity of the person and religious freedom, or whether they betray them, under an apparently neutral language⁶⁹.

I have tried to offer you, in this Lectio, three keys of reading which hold together like the stones of a single edifice. 1) The dignity of the person and religious freedom, as the root of every human coexistence, which no gender ideology or alleged "reproductive health" can erase. 2) The self-determination of peoples, as the space of freedom in which each people can embody this

dignity in its own religious and cultural history, without suffering conditionalities masked as cooperation. 3) And finally Africa — not as an object of social engineering conceived elsewhere, but as a subject of culture, of faith, of suffering and of hope, for the Church and for the West itself⁷⁰.

One last word, born from the heart of an African pastor: the history of the faith on my continent teaches us that the Church grows, often, precisely in the seasons of trial, and that the peoples who guard their own religious and cultural identity, against every external pressure, are, in the end, those who best serve the cause of a true universal fraternity. I do not ask of the European Parliament an act of faith, but an act of reason: verify, with the very instruments of your juridical wisdom, whether the words you pronounce truly honour the human person, the family, the freedom of peoples. If they do, Africa and Europe will walk together. If they do not, no treaty, however well written, will be able to bridge the distance that the "betrayed words" will have dug between us.

Thank you.

¹ **Leo XIV**, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 9 January 2026: vatican.va, <http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/speeches/2026/january/documents/20260109-corpo-diplomatico.html>

² Dossier "Conditioned Aid" prepared by Pro Vita & Famiglia for the European Parliament Conference, Brussels, 15 July 2026 (internal documentation placed at the basis of the present intervention).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ **Leo XIV**, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas* on the safeguarding of the human person in the age of artificial intelligence, 15 May 2026: vatican.va, <http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ **Benedict XVI**, *Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections*, Address at the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006: vatican.va, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ **Benedict XVI**, *Meeting with the World of Culture*, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, 12 September 2008: vatican.va, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura.html

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ **Benedict XVI**, *Address to the German Bundestag*, Reichstag, Berlin, 22 September 2011: vatican.va, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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