

## Liberty, equality... whatever happened to fraternità?

*House of Commons, Westminster, London, 22 June 2004*

Distinguished Speaker of the House of Commons,  
Honorable Members of Parliament,  
My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real honor and a joy for me to address such a distinguished gathering here in London. In thanking you all for coming, it is my heartfelt desire that this meeting will prove to be a moment of peace and calm in the midst of your busy schedules.

I would like to share with you something that has come to life in the political field in these last few years. It has come about as a result of a charisma or gift that I myself received many years ago and that has borne fruit in every part of the world, among people of different cultures, religious faiths and social backgrounds. It is an experience and culture founded on unity, something for which humankind has always felt a profound need.

The title proposed for today's meeting is: "Liberty, equality...whatever happened to fraternity?" These three: liberty, equality, fraternity, almost sum up the political program of the modern world, expressing a deep intuition and leading us to a profound reflection today. But what point have we reached in achieving these great aspirations?

The French Revolution announced these three principles but it certainly did not invent them. They had already been elaborated through the centuries, above all through the Christian message, which enlightened the best ancient traditions of the various peoples and drew on the heritage of Jewish revelation, bringing about a true revolution. The new humanism revealed by Christ enabled people to live these principles to the full.

From that announcement onwards, and down the centuries, the richness of these principles has been revealed through the works of men and women.

Much ground has been covered along this journey and the United Kingdom has often paved the way.

Liberty and equality have deeply marked the political history of peoples, resulting in a more civilized society and creating the conditions for the expression of human dignity to grow.

Certainly, the development of these two principles is familiar to a people that produced the *Magna Carta* and the *Bill of Rights*, to a people that acted as teacher in the invention of democracy and social politics.

Liberty and equality have become juridical principles and are applied every day as real and true political categories.

But as we know well, if emphasis falls solely on liberty, it can easily become the privilege of the strongest. And as history confirms, emphasis solely on equality can result in mass collectivism. In reality, many peoples still do not benefit from the true meaning of liberty and equality....

How can these be acquired and brought to fruition? How can the history of our countries and of all humankind resume the journey toward its true destiny? We believe that the key lies in universal fraternity, in giving this its proper place among fundamental political categories.

Only if taken together can these three principles give rise to a political model capable of meeting the challenges of today's world.

Rarely has our planet been subject to the suspicion, fear and even terror of our times. We only have to remember September 11, 2001, and more recently in Madrid, March 11, 2004, as well as the hundreds of other attacks which, in the last few years, have riddled our daily news reports.

Terrorism—a disaster just as serious as the dozens of wars that even now bloody our planet! But what are the causes? There are many. However, we cannot help but recognize that one of the deepest causes is the economic and social imbalance between rich and poor countries. This imbalance generates resentment, hostility and revenge, thus providing a breeding ground for fundamentalism that takes root more easily in such terrain.

Now, if this is how things are, in order to reduce and put an end to terrorism, war is certainly not the answer. We need to pursue the way of dialogue, and therefore, political and diplomatic routes. But this is not enough. We need to promote solidarity among everyone in the world and a more equitable communion of goods.

It goes without saying that there are many more burning issues facing national and international politics. In the Western world the very model for economic development is now undeniably in crisis, a crisis that no longer demands merely minor adjustments, but a global reappraisal in order to overcome the current downturn.

The relentless march of scientific research cannot continue unless it guarantees the integrity and health of humankind and the entire ecosystem. In acknowledging the essential role of the communications media in the modern world, we must establish certain basic rules aimed at promoting values and safeguarding individuals, groups and peoples.

While recognizing the current irreversible process of globalization, a key question arises from the need to defend and appreciate the many riches that come from the different ethnic, religious and cultural groups.

These are some of the major challenges facing the world today that urgently call for the idea and the practice of fraternity, and since this is a worldwide problem, they call for universal fraternity.

Many great thinkers promoted universal fraternity.

Mahatma Gandhi said: “The golden rule is to be friends with the world and to consider the whole human family as ‘one’.”<sup>1</sup>

And with regard to the events of September 11, 2001, the Dalai Lama wrote: “The reasons (for the events of these days) are clear to us. ... We have forgotten the most basic of human truths. ... We are all one. This is the message that the human race has greatly ignored. Forgetting this truth is the only cause of hatred and war.”

However, the one who brought fraternity as an essential gift to humanity, was Jesus who prayed shortly before he died: “Father, may they all be one” (Jn 17, 21). In revealing God as our Father, he made us all brothers and sisters and broke down the walls which separate those who are “the same” from those who are “different”, friends from enemies.

Fraternity, then, is the ideal that we need to affirm. Fraternity is an ideal for today.

But are there signs of fraternity in people’s lives today?

Over the years, I’ve experienced so often God’s providential hand in my own life and in the lives of others. And I’ve had direct contact with many peoples, and have learned to recognise these steps which are a sign of the progress of humanity, to affirm that humanity is travelling on a slow, but unstoppable journey towards universal fraternity.

The facts are in front of us, but we have to know how to interpret them. The world’s longing for unity has never been so alive and evident as it is today. The signs of this are:

- The coming together of separate states and the processes of an economic and political integration —and here we cannot fail to mention Europe—which are gaining strength both on a continental level and in other geopolitical areas.

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<sup>1</sup>. *In buona compagnia*, edited by Claudio Mantovano, Rome, 2001, p. 11.

- The role of international organizations, especially the United Nations, more crucial today than ever in knowing, facing and responding to the key questions affecting the lives of peoples and countries.
- The development of an increasingly wide and fruitful dialogue among people of various Christian traditions, with people of different religious faiths, and also with people who have no particular religious affiliation.
- The growth of social, cultural and religious movements which present themselves as new leading figures in international relations and working together toward worldwide objectives.

Therefore, the means necessary to give the world that fraternity which generates spiritual unity and which guarantees unity in politics, economics, and in social and cultural spheres are not lacking. We need only to recognize them.

One means whose effectiveness has not yet been completely discovered is the existence of dozens and dozens of Movements, which began to appear in the Christian world after the first few decades of the twentieth century. They form many networks that link people who vary in ethnicity, culture or any other way, almost a sign that because in prototype this is already true for them, the world could become a home for the nations.

These Movements are the result not of human plans or projects but of gifts of the Spirit of God who, more than any man or woman on earth, knows the problems of our planet and wants to provide all his support to resolve them.

Because these Movements were founded by or are mostly made up of laypeople, they carry with them a profound concern for human affairs. Consequently, they have effects in civil life, offering practical and achievable projects in the fields of politics, economics, and so forth.

These diverse and wonderful Movements have come to life in various Churches: Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox, and others. On 8 May 2004, in Stuttgart, Germany, they presented themselves in a highly successful event that they themselves organized, transmitted via satellite across Europe and beyond. The day was entitled: *Together for Europe*.

They offered to work toward achieving—alongside the Europe of politics or economics, or the Euro—the Europe of the spirit, seeking to give a soul to Europe, a process that would also give a better guarantee to the continent’s plurality and cohesion.

To give an example of these movements I would like to present to you the main ideas of our Focolare Movement whose aim is precisely that of unity and universal fraternity.

It came to life while Trent (Northern Italy) was being bombed during the Second World War. Buildings were crumbling and with them our plans for the future, our hopes and certainties.

Everything was collapsing, yet in our young hearts a single truth was emerging with an intensity we had never known before: God is the only Ideal that never dies, God who was revealing himself to us for what he is, Love. And precisely at the height of hatred and division, God who is Love suggested to us that to love him we needed to love one another and bring this love to everyone, a love that spread immediately throughout the city, and later, with the passing of time, across the world to 182 countries.

This call to unity made us prefer those places in the world where there was the most division. As a result, there stood out ever more clearly specific areas of dialogue and sharing: first of all within the individual Churches, where the Movement gives its contribution so that there may be more communion; among Christians of various denominations; then with the faithful of the great religions via numerous respectful and fruitful experiences of the “dialogue of life,” the premise for peace; and finally, a dialogue with those who have no particular religious affiliation, which includes a committed working together on various projects.

Although the Focolare is primarily a religious movement, from its beginnings and down through the years it has shown special interest in the many aspects of the life of society, including the political world. As a result of this, the Movement for Unity in Politics was born. Now it too is spreading and establishing itself throughout the world.

I have had several opportunities to speak of the birth and development of the Movement for Unity in Politics, addressing members of Parliament in various European nations as well as in Strasbourg, at the European Center in Madrid and at the United Nations.

The specific goal of this Movement, the political expression of the Focolare, is to help people and groups involved in politics to rediscover the profound, eternal values of the human person, to put fraternity at the basis of their lives and only then to move on to political action. A consequence of this is that political action goes from interpersonal love to the possibility of a greater love, which reaches out to the entire *polis* (the city). In acquiring a political dimension, this love does not lose its particular characteristics: the involvement of the whole person, with the intelligence and the will to reach everyone; the intuition and the imagination to take the first step; the realism to put oneself in the other person's shoes; the capacity to give oneself without hope of personal gain and to open up new paths to dialogue even when human limitations and failures would seem to block them.

The Movement for Unity in Politics aims to include administrators, members of parliament, party activists — politicians at every level of government and of the most varied political parties—who feel the duty to work together with the one who really has sovereignty, the citizen. In addition, it embraces citizens who want to be involved politically, students and political analysts who want to offer their contribution in expertise and research, and local government officers aware of their particular place in the political system.

This Movement proposes and gives witness to a lifestyle that allows politics in the best way possible to reach its goal: the common good in the unity of the social body.

Indeed, it would be good to invite all those involved in politics to make a pact of fraternity for the benefit of their country, one that puts its good above all partial interests, whether those of individuals, groups, classes or parties.

Yes, fraternity offers surprising possibilities. It helps to bring together and give value to demands that otherwise could develop into insoluble conflicts. It harmonizes the experience of local autonomy with the sense of a shared history. It strengthens our awareness of the importance of international organizations and all those systems that attempt to overcome barriers and take important steps toward the unity of the human family.

Fraternity can give rise to projects and actions in the complex political, economic, cultural and social fabric of our world. Fraternity brings peoples out of their isolation and can offer the opportunity for development to those still excluded from it. It shows us how to resolve differences peacefully and relegates war to history books. Fraternity in action allows us to dream and even to hope for some kind of communion of goods between rich countries and poor countries.

The profound need for peace expressed by humanity today indicates that fraternity is not only a value, not only a method, but also the global paradigm for political development. This is why an increasingly interdependent world

needs politicians, entrepreneurs, intellectuals and artists who put fraternity— an instrument of unity — at the center of their actions and thoughts. Martin Luther King dreamt that fraternity would become the organizing principle for business people and the principle of organization for people who govern. The politicians of the Movement for Unity in Politics want to make this dream a reality.

But this is only possible if, in political activity, one does not forget the spiritual dimension or at least believe in the profound values that must rule the life of society.

Igino Giordani, an Italian member of parliament and co-founder of the Focolare Movement, wrote in his own unique style: “When we cross the threshold of our home to plunge into the world, we

cannot leave our faith hanging on the back of the door like a worn-out hat.” And shortly afterwards he added: “Politics is charity in action, handmaid not ruler.”

One day I seemed to understand in what sense politics could be considered love. If we were to give a color to every human activity, to economy, to health, communication, art, culture, the administration of justice...politics would not have a color. It would be the background, it would be black so as to highlight all the other colors. For this reason politics should seek to be in constant dialogue with every other aspect of life, in order to provide the conditions for society itself, in all its expressions, to achieve its design completely. Of course, in this constant attention toward dialogue, politics must reserve to itself certain areas: promoting fair, unbiased policies; giving preference to those in need; fostering participation at all times, which means dialogue, mediation, responsibility and practical action.

The politicians I am speaking of choose to seek office as an act of love. It is a response to a genuine vocation, to a personal calling. Those who are believers discern the voice of God calling them through circumstances, while those with no religious affiliation respond to a human call, to a social need, to a city’s problems, to the sufferings of their people which speak to their conscience. In both cases, it is love that motivates them to act. And both find their home in the Movement for Unity in Politics.

The politicians for unity, having come to understand that politics at its root is love, realize that others too—even those who at times can be called their political opponents —may have also chosen politics as a vocation to love. They realize that every political group, every political choice can be a response to a social need and therefore is necessary in building up the common good. They are as interested in the others’ goals, including their political causes, as they are in their own, and thus criticism becomes constructive. They seek to live out the apparent contradiction of loving the other’s party as their own because they realize that the nation’s well-being requires everyone’s cooperation.

This, in outline, is the ideal of the Movement for Unity in Politics. And in my opinion it is a kind of politics worth living. It forms politicians capable of recognizing and serving the vision for their community, their town and nation, indeed for all humanity, because fraternity is God’s vision for the whole human family. This is the kind of genuine, authoritative politics that every country needs. In fact, with power comes strength but only love gives authority.

This type of politics builds works that will last. Future generations will be grateful to politicians not for having retained power but for how they used it.

This is the kind of politics that the Movement for Unity in Politics, with the help of God, wishes to generate and support.

So, then, what is my wish for you, politicians of the United Kingdom?

That this people and in particular its representatives, rich in their noble history of democracy, may find through fraternity the energy necessary to continue along their path with even greater effectiveness and give their contribution as leading figures in the human family’s history of unity. We, for our part, promise not to leave you on your own, but to put at your disposal the charism of unity that heaven offers to the whole of humanity.