

EUROPE AND AFRICA: IN DIALOGUE WITH CARDINAL ROBERT SARAH,
DELIVERED, 15 JULY, IN BRUSSELS

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The linguistic confusion surrounding new rights and a reversal of reason lie at the heart of the crisis facing the West, which has lost sight of the meaning of its own civilisation. The call to return to logos and to the truth of the person, the family and peoples in the lectio magistralis on Europe and Africa: In Dialogue with Cardinal Robert Sarah, delivered, 15 July, in Brussels, in Room SPAAK 5B1 of the European Parliament, at the invitation of the ECR Group (European Conservatives and Reformists), together with SOS Chrétiens d'Orient and Pro Vita e Famiglia.

1. Logos, the Word and conflicting world views

Mr President,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Friends of Pro Vita e Famiglia,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for inviting me to share with you, in this house of the peoples of Europe, some reflections that are close to my heart as a son of Africa and as a shepherd of the Catholic Church. I do not come to you with a speech for the occasion, but with a question that 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 to those who utter them in Brussels, Strasbourg, Kampala or Conakry?

Last January, when Pope Leo XIV received the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, he uttered a phrase that I would like to present as the key to understanding my entire reflection today. The Pope stated: ‘We need words to once again express certain realities unequivocally. Only in this way can an authentic dialogue, free from 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: a crisis of logos, of reason.

In the dossier prepared for this meeting, which I have studied carefully, it emerges with documented clarity that, in relations between the European Union and Africa, words are today used not to reveal reality, but to conceal it or even to overturn it (2). We speak of 'sexual and reproductive health' and, in many cases, what is meant is access to abortion. We speak of 'gender equality' and what is meant, at times, is the deconstruction of the sexual difference between man and woman inherent in the human body. There is talk of "human rights" for African countries, and what is meant is the imposition of legal categories alien to our history, our faith, our culture and our anthropological vision. If words no longer mean what they say, how can there be genuine dialogue? How can Africa trust a Europe that speaks in ambiguous, double-meaning terms?

This is not a matter of academic semantics: it is a political issue, a matter of truth and honesty in human relations, of the utmost importance. A treaty, a resolution or an action plan that uses imprecise and ambiguous vocabulary is not an instrument of cooperation, but an instrument of perversion and silent power, of cultural and economic neo-colonialism: whoever controls the meaning of words effectively controls the outcome of the negotiations, without the other party realising it. This is precisely what is happening, and it is what I shall endeavour to shed light on in this lecture, in the light of the Gospel and reason (3).

I would like to link this analysis to a text which I consider to be of extraordinary relevance today: the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which Pope Leo XIV signed last May. In it, the Pontiff denounces the use of technical, manipulative and deceptive – designed for the age of artificial intelligence, but applicable, I believe, to many areas of international cooperation – which risks reducing the human person to statistical categories of economic power, rather than recognising them as a free subject endowed with transcendent dignity (4). Leo XIV calls for a way of thinking which is, in his own words, 'dynamic and faithful to the Gospel', capable of safeguarding the truth of the person even when the techniques of power – economic, legal and communicative – seek to rewrite it for their own ends (5). The Encyclical tells us that the issue is still, and always will be, anthropological.

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

1.1 Benedict XVI and the primacy of the logos

To fully understand this crisis of words, we must trace it back to a deeper source: the crisis of reason itself. And here I must pay tribute to the prophetic clarity of the great Pope, Benedict XVI, who was the first, in three memorable addresses, to diagnose the evil that we now see unfolding in its fullness.

In Regensburg, in September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI recalled that the Christian God acts, to use the Greek expression of Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1348–1425) on which he commented, 'σὺν λόγῳ', with logos (6). Logos – the Pope explained – signifies both reason and word, a creative reason, capable of communicating itself, precisely because it is reason (7). "Not to act in accordance with reason, not to act with the logos, is contrary to the nature of God," he wrote, quoting the Byzantine emperor (8). From this follows a consequence that I would like to emphasize strongly before this assembly: a reason which, in the face of the divine, turns a deaf ear and relegates religion

to the realm of private subcultures, becomes itself incapable – to quote Benedict once more – of engaging in dialogue between cultures (9).

Let us apply this principle to the issue of ‘rights’, which dominates our European debates today. When Europe constructs rights detached from the truth about the human person – such as abortion, which some would like to elevate to a ‘fundamental right’, or sexual identity reduced to mere subjective self-definition – reason itself becomes distorted: from an instrument for knowing the truth, it becomes an instrument of power, capable of imposing itself by force of law and money upon those who do not share those premises.

Pope Benedict XVI added, again in 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 humanity – starting with the Christian one and that of the great African religious traditions – to the status of superstition to be corrected (10). This is why, when a set of ideological conditions is presented today as synonymous with ‘modernity’ or ‘progress’, we should recognize in it not an expansion, but a 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 allow oneself to be found by Him: this is no less necessary today than in times past’, he told representatives of French culture (11). And he added a warning which, read today, sounds almost prophetic: “A purely positivist culture, which were to relegate the question of God to the subjective realm as unscientific, would amount to the capitulation of reason, a renunciation of its greatest potential” (12). Christianity, the Pope went on to explain on that occasion, perceives in human words the Word, the Logos itself: for a Christian, words are never merely a tool, but share in the truth they communicate (13).

Three years later, at the German Bundestag, Pope Benedict XVI brought this reflection to the very heart of European legislative practice. “Where positivist reason regards itself as the only sufficient culture, relegating all other cultural realities to the status of subcultures, it reduces man; indeed, it threatens his very humanity” (14). And he asked the German legislators: “How can reason rediscover its greatness without slipping into the irrational?” (15). This is precisely the question I would like to put to you today, Honourable Members of Parliament: is European legislation which claims to be ‘neutral’ towards every anthropological vision, but which in fact imposes – through treaties, aid and trade conditions – a specific and questionable vision of the human person throughout the world, not in fact slipping precisely into that irrationality against which Pope Benedict XVI warned us? From these three major addresses arises the bridge I wish to build towards today’s topic: the critique of those forms of ‘ideological colonisation’ which use international law and European or international funding to impose questionable and contestable anthropological views on peoples who have not chosen them (16).

1.2 The Three Popes and Ideological Colonisation

This primacy of the logos, threatened by legal and economic positivism, finds its most direct and painful application precisely in the issue of gender ideology. It was once again Benedict XVI, in his final Christmas address to the Roman Curia in December 2012, who offered us the theological key to understanding it. Quoting 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-established by his physical being, which characterises the human being as a man or a woman [...] He denies his own nature and decides that it

is not given to him as a pre-established fact, but that he himself creates it”(17). And he drew a stern conclusion from this: “Where the freedom to act becomes the freedom to make oneself, one inevitably ends up denying the Creator himself” (18). “Whoever defends God,” concluded Benedict, “defends humanity” (19).

This theological framework enables us to gain a deeper understanding of categories such as S.O.G.I. (sexual orientation and gender identity) and C.S.R.H.E. (“comprehensive” sexual and reproductive health education), which recur with such insistence in the treaties between the European Union and African countries (20). These are not neutral categories: they are the political and legal application of that very same denial of given nature, of that very same rejection of the Creator, of which Benedict spoke to us.

Please note, Honourable Members of Parliament and dear friends, how these categories do not appear in isolation in a single document, but are systematically repeated – in parliamentary resolutions, in trade protocols, in sectoral action plans – to the point of constituting what we may rightly call a veritable system (21). A system does not arise by chance: it arises from a coherent worldview, which is precisely that secularised and irrational worldview – in the most technical sense of the term – contrary to the logos – that I described at the outset.

Pope Francis, for his part, has given this system, this phenomenon, a name that has now entered common parlance: ‘ideological colonisation’. During his meeting with families in Manila in January 2015, he said, in words that deserve to be heard in full: “Let us be on our guard against new forms of ideological colonisation. There are forms of ideological colonisation that seek to destroy the family [...] They do not arise [...] from prayer, from an encounter with God [...] they come from outside, and that is why I say they are forms of colonisation” (22). A few days later, at the press conference on the return flight, Francis was even more explicit, recalling the complaints of the African bishops gathered at the Synod: “This is ideological colonisation: they enter a people with an idea that has nothing to do with that people [...] it is the same as when certain conditions are imposed for certain loans” (23).

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

2. The dignity of the human person and religious freedom

2.1 Ontological principle: the dignity of the person and the logos

Let us begin with 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 indeed ‘magnificent’, irreducible to a statistical figure, a productive function, or a changing subjective preference (24). Every social, economic and technological order – the encyclical insists – must be judged on the basis of this dignity and the person’s vocation to communion with God, not the other way round (25).

From this ontological principle flows, as its first and most radical consequence, religious freedom. It is not merely one right amongst others, added alongside other rights: it is, as Pope Leo XIV recalled in that very address to the Diplomatic Corps, the root of

every other freedom, because it concerns the constitutive relationship of the human person with truth and with God (26). To deny it, to restrict it, or worse still, to manipulate it for the purposes of foreign policy, is to strike at the very heart of human dignity.

It is no coincidence that Pope Leo XIV chose to explicitly link his first encyclical to the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII (27). In 1891, **Rerum Novarum** defended the family, work and the right of association, presenting the Church as the guarantor of a holistic vision of the human person against the ideologies of the age – at that time, socialist collectivism and individualistic liberalism; today, I believe, economic technocracy and gender ideology (28). This continuity between the two Pontiffs is no coincidence: 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 fact 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 from theological school: it is the keystone of my entire argument. If dignity were merely a value, it could be negotiated, weighed up or suspended in the name of other competing values – economic efficiency, geopolitical stability, electoral consensus. But if dignity is an ontological fact, it precedes all political deliberation and judges it: no parliament, whether European or African, creates it; every parliament worthy of the name has the duty to recognise and protect it.

2.2 Abortion and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights [SRHR]: from the right to life to the so-called right to terminate

It is precisely on this ontological ground that one of the most serious subvertings of the logos is taking place in our time. In June and July 2022, the European Parliament adopted resolutions calling on the Commission and the Member States to “prioritise universal access to safe and legal abortion” in the Union’s external relations, and proposing to include abortion amongst the fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (29).

Here, the subversion of logos or reason reaches its most dramatic point: the lack of access to abortion is defined as ‘violence’, whilst the unborn child – the weakest, the most innocent among us – is deprived of any voice, any representation, any right (30). The words ‘health’, ‘rights’ and ‘freedom’ thus cease to denote certain realities – to use Pope Leo XIV’s expression once more – and become rhetoric in the service of suppressing the weakest (31). This is not merely one opinion amongst many: it is the most radical denial possible of the ontological principle I have just referred to – because it denies, at its very root, that the unborn is a person, or even the mere possibility that it might truly be one.

I would like to add a point that directly concerns religious freedom. A legal system that elevates abortion to the status of a fundamental right in treaties and external relations, and which seeks to make cooperation with third countries conditional upon this, effectively compels states, religious communities, and healthcare and educational staff to conform to a view of the human person that is incompatible with their religious convictions. This is not neutrality: it is imposition and unacceptable oppression. It amounts to imposing, through legal and financial means, a specific anthropology on communities that do not share it, constituting, in the true sense of the word, a violation of religious freedom and freedom of conscience – that very freedom which Pope Leo XIV reminded us is the root of every other freedom (32).

It is worth recalling that the legal systems of many African countries still enshrine, in their constitutional law, an explicit link between the dignity of the person and the

protection of unborn life; a link which Europe, in many of its legal systems, has instead severed. Article 26 of the Kenyan Constitution states that ‘human life begins at conception’ (33). Article 22 of the Ugandan Constitution provides that ‘no person shall have the right to terminate the life of an unborn child, except as authorised by law’ (34). This is not a relic of the past: it is, if anything, a fragment of legal wisdom, rooted as much in natural law as in African religious traditions, which the West would do well to reconsider rather than amend. It is no coincidence that, just this year, the Kenyan Court of Appeal firmly reaffirmed this constitutional principle, rejecting the interpretation that sought to make abortion a fundamental right (35). Here is a concrete example of what I mean when I speak of the self-determination of peoples, in keeping with the dignity of the person: a continent which, though lacking in material resources, has not lost sight of what it means to be human.

2.3 Gender, education and the redefined person

The third aspect of this upheaval concerns education, the place par excellence where a civilisation transmits the truth about itself to the younger generations. Article 40. 6 of the Africa Protocol to the Samoa Agreement – the framework agreement that currently governs 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 and education’ (CSRHE), with explicit reference to international technical guidelines on sexuality education (36).

The European Union’s “Gender Action Plan III”, for its part, mandates an avowedly “gender-transformative” approach and stipulates that at least 85 per cent of the Union’s new external actions must incorporate gender equality objectives (37).

Here we can directly apply Pope Benedict XVI’s critique of gender ideology, which I have referred to: education becomes the laboratory in which children are taught to regard their sexual identity as purely fluid and self-determined, detached from the body, family history and relationships; contrary to that ‘logos’ of creation of which Pope Ratzinger spoke in Regensburg, Paris and Berlin (38). We must not be afraid to call a spade a spade, as Pope Leo XIV urges us: when a ‘protocol’ or a technical ‘action plan’ imposes a single educational model on human sexuality upon an entire continent, without any real consultation with the peoples concerned, we are once again faced with that ideological and oppressive colonisation, which Pope Francis has repeatedly and dramatically denounced (39)

This manifests itself here in the use of educational programmes and conditional aid to penetrate the cultural fabric of African countries, redefining the individual and the family according to secularised Western standards that have no place in the history of those peoples (40). Well then, Honourable Members of Parliament, I ask, respectfully but with equal firmness, that the words ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘marriage’ and ‘family’ should not be reduced to social constructs that can be manipulated at will to suit the ideological fashions of the moment, but should be safeguarded as ontological realities—realities created and not self-produced by humankind—and, for those who are believers, as realities of biblical revelation. This is precisely what Pope Leo XIV means when he calls for these words to once again express certain realities (41).

3. The self-determination of peoples

Article 1, paragraph 2, of the United Nations Charter lists among the Organisation’s very purposes the development of friendly relations among nations based on respect for

the principle of equal rights and the self-determination of peoples (42). The OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] principles on the effectiveness of development aid, referred to in the dossier, reaffirm that international co-operation must align with the priorities defined by recipient countries, rather than imposing them from outside (43).

From this principle follows a consequence that I would like to emphasise clearly: respect for a people's religious and cultural history – all the more commendable the more it safeguards the family, life and the transmission of the faith – is not an obstacle to development, as is sometimes insinuated in the corridors of Brussels, but a fundamental requirement of justice (44). Human dignity and religious freedom also have a communal and historical dimension: a people has the right to live, preserve and pass on its own religious, cultural and family traditions, just as the individual has the right to profess his or her faith.

It is perhaps worth recalling here that Christianity is neither a recent import to Africa nor a remnant of European colonialism, as is sometimes insinuated in certain secularised circles. Long before Europe evangelised sub-Saharan Africa in the modern era, North Africa and the Horn of Africa had already given the universal Church some of its greatest teachers: Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, and, above all, Augustine of Hippo, whose reflections on the relationship between faith and reason have nourished theology and the whole of Western culture for centuries, including, not coincidentally, Pope Benedict XVI himself. Ethiopia has maintained an unbroken Christian tradition since the 4th century. When, therefore, we speak of the religious self-determination of African peoples, we are not defending a 'tribal particularism' set against a supposed European universalism: we are defending the freedom of a continent which has, from the very beginning, helped to shape that very same Christian logos which Europe today risks forgetting. This, if we think about it carefully, turns on its head the implicit narrative of a certain form of development cooperation, which treats Africa as a perpetual learner and Europe as the 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 addressing the Bundestag, offers us here a decisive concept: that of the 'ecology of man' and of natural law, a law that precedes positive political power and judges it from the outside (45). "The law is not merely a product of the legislator's will, but must recognise a truth about man and society that no parliament can decree at will" (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 very foundation, which is precisely the dignity of every people to be the subject, and not the object, of their own history.

I would like to add to this principle a second cornerstone of the Church's social doctrine which sheds light on our topic: the principle of subsidiarity. John Paul II, in the encyclical **Centesimus Annus**, recalled that a higher-order society must never take the place of the initiative and responsibility of communities at a lower level, depriving them of their powers, but must rather support them in times of need and help them to coordinate their actions with those of other social components, with a view to the common good (47). Applied to international relations, this principle tells us that the European Union, however well-intentioned, does not have the task of rewriting family law, criminal law, the education systems of sovereign African states from the outside: rather, its task is to support them, when they so request, in achieving their legitimate aims. The reversal of this order – that is, the claim that the higher, supranational order should regulate the moral

and family life of peoples down to the smallest detail – is not subsidiarity, but its exact opposite: it is ideological centralisation, which the Church's social doctrine has always condemned, wherever it may come from.

4. Africa: the needs, the struggles and the contribution required of the West and the Church

4.1 The European Union's system of conditionality

We must recognise that there is a 'three-tier' system through which the principle of self-determination is – in effect – circumvented (48). At the regulatory level are the European Parliament resolutions I have already referred to on abortion and LGBT+ rights (49). At the second level, the legal-conventional level, lies the Samoa Agreement, which contains a supremacy clause capable of conditioning the entire framework of relations between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (50). At the third level – the financial and trade level – we find the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument [NDICI], the proposal COM(2025)0551 currently under discussion, and the preferential trade arrangements (51).

A specific case – that of Uganda (52) – illustrates well how these three levels are interlinked. In its resolution of 20 April 2023, the European Parliament called on the Commission to use all available diplomatic, legal and financial means to dissuade the Ugandan President from enacting the law approved by the Ugandan Parliament and, should it be enacted, to consider withdrawing the trade preferences granted to Uganda under the 'Everything But Arms' scheme, to activate the 'essential elements' clause of the Cotonou Agreement and to consider the Union's comprehensive sanctions regime on human rights; Parliament also called for a Union strategy for the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality (53). Well, I say this in sober but firm terms: here we see, in a complete and verifiable form, 'ideological colonisation' – the use of trade and finance to interfere in the criminal and family law of a sovereign state, in direct violation of the principle of self-determination of peoples (54).

The proposed Regulation COM (2025)0551, currently under discussion, provides for a total budget 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 with the guaranteed minimum for the current cycle – from 29.18 to approximately 60.5 billion euros. The language on the Beijing Platform, the ICPD, sexual and reproductive health, and comprehensive sexuality education is retained in the basic text and reproduced in the sectoral pillars of European intervention, whilst the previous binding quantitative targets are replaced by a cross-cutting 'mainstreaming' approach: ideological conditionality does not disappear, but becomes more pervasive and less measurable (55). It is here that I would like to refer once again to **Magnifica Humanitas**: technology and economic power, as Pope Leo's Encyclical reminds us, become instruments of domination and perverse oppression when they are not governed by charity and justice (56). The Church is not asking Europe to stop helping Africa – far from it – but is calling for the 'culture of power' to be transformed into a 'civilisation of love' (57).

4.2 The Voices and Suffering of Africa: The Role of the Church and the West

Allow me now, in this highly symbolic setting, to give a voice to those who have none: Africans themselves. This dossier brings together first-hand accounts from African government officials who denounce the European Union's insistence on categories such

as SOGI [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity] in negotiations, whilst Europe systematically refuses to discuss issues of equal urgency for Africa, such as the restitution of colonial artefacts; others speak openly of a ‘fait accompli’, which can be summed up as: ‘If you do not sign, there will be consequences’ (58). These are not my own words: they are words gathered from independent academic analyses and first-hand accounts, and they tell us that the diagnosis of cultural neo-colonialism is not political or ecclesiastical propaganda, but a lived experience of those sitting on the other side of the negotiating table (59).

It is no surprise, then, that in May 2025, in Entebbe, Uganda, African parliamentarians and institutional representatives gathered at a conference opened by President Museveni to propose an African Charter on the Family and Cultural Sovereignty. On that occasion, President Museveni stated, referring explicitly to the Samoa Agreement: “I urge you to study that Samoa document which deals with all these matters you are discussing: if it truly contains what is claimed about reproductive rights, then we will have to withdraw from that absurdity, and tell the European Union that we cannot be part of that injustice” (60). Strong 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 agents, capable of saying “no” to anything that contradicts their vision of the person and the family.

But it would be unfair of me to limit myself to mere condemnation. Pope Benedict XVI, in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation **Africae Munus**, clearly set out what Africa legitimately expects from the West and from the Church: not ideological interference, but genuine solidarity in reconciliation, justice and peace – solidarity capable of accompanying without taking over, and of giving without claiming to reshape the soul of peoples in its own image (61).

In practical terms, this means a renewed commitment to debt relief, to the transfer of technologies beneficial to healthcare and agriculture, to support for the educational and healthcare networks that the Catholic Church has been running for centuries across the continent – often stepping in where the state has failed – and to the joint fight against corruption and poor governance, which weigh as heavily on the African peoples as external interference. It also means, for the Western Church, rediscovering Africa not as a mission field to be assisted, but as a living source of faith, of vocations, of large and joyful families, from which an ageing and weary Europe has much to learn and to receive.

As a son of Africa, I wish to add a few words of my own. I have repeatedly denounced – and I repeat this today in this forum – the desire of certain powers to impose false values through political and financial means: in some African countries, entire ministries dedicated to gender theory have been set up in exchange for economic support (62). I have also pointed out, when a Secretary-General of the United Nations came to Africa to demand the decriminalisation of homosexuality as a condition of civilisation, that this sort of absurdity cannot be imposed on the poor whilst they lack hospitals, schools and drinking water (63). Africa’s material poverty does not rob it of its dignity, nor of its right – indeed, it perhaps gives it an even stronger claim – to judge for itself what is best for its children.

In 2015, during the Synod on the Family, I said – and I do not take back a single word of it today – that gender ideology and Islamic fundamentalism represent, each in its own way, two ‘apocalyptic beasts’, which threaten to destroy not only the family, but humanity itself, the image of God (64). Some considered this image to be an exaggeration; I continue to believe that it captures something of the truth: both these forces, though very

different in origin and form, share the claim to rewrite humanity in their own image – one in the name of so-called progress, the other in the name of a so-called return to an original purity – denying in every case that religious freedom and that dignity of the person which I have placed at the heart of this Lectio.

I would like to conclude by sharing a deeper conviction, which I have come to hold over many years of service to the Church: the crisis of the Church in the West and the crisis of the West itself are, at heart, one and the same crisis. It is because the Church in many European nations has lost its identity, its prophetic voice, that the West itself has lost the meaning of its own civilisation (65). And I would add: even in the West today, religious freedom is under threat (66). Here, the three Popes I have referred to in this Lectio are intertwined in a single testimony: Pope Benedict XVI defends the ecology of the human person and the family against legal positivism; Pope Francis denounces ideological colonisation and calls for authentic intercultural dialogue; Pope Leo XIV calls for words to once again express certain realities and proposes a multilateralism purified of ideologies (67). This is an appeal I address, with respect but without reservation, to Europe and to the Church in the West: undertake a serious examination of conscience. Listen to Africa. Respect its cultural sovereignty. Offer free cooperation, unencumbered by ideological agendas. Be willing to receive from Africa what it can still offer to a weary West: the witness of a living faith and a sense of family, which can help Europe itself rediscover its own logos.

Conclusion: Returning to the logos and to certain realities

Honourable Members of Parliament, allow me to conclude where I began: with the words of Pope Leo XIV. Without words that point back to certain realities, the Holy Father told us, there can be no authentic dialogue (68), not even within the Catholic Church. And I would add: without logos, diplomacy and international cooperation degenerate into a power game masked by technical language. I would therefore like to invite the entire European Parliament and the representatives present here to undertake a genuine examination of language: to state clearly, without diplomatic ambiguity, what is really meant when we speak of ‘human rights’, ‘sexual and reproductive health’, ‘gender’, and ‘family’, and to ask ourselves, with intellectual honesty, whether these definitions truly respect the dignity of the person and religious freedom, or whether they betray them, beneath a seemingly neutral language (69).

In this Lectio, I have sought to offer you three interpretative frameworks that hold together like the stones of a single edifice. 1) The dignity of the person and religious freedom, as the foundation of all human coexistence, which no gender ideology or so-called ‘reproductive health’ can erase. 2) The self-determination of peoples, as a space of freedom in which every people can embody this dignity within their own religious and cultural history, without being subjected to conditions disguised as cooperation. 3) And finally, Africa – not as the object of social engineering devised elsewhere, but as a subject of culture, faith, suffering and hope, for the Church and for the West itself (70).

One final word from the heart of an African pastor: the history of faith on my continent teaches us that the Church often grows precisely in times of trial, and that those peoples who safeguard their religious and cultural identity, in the face of all external pressure, are, in the end, those who best serve the cause of true universal brotherhood. I do not ask the European Parliament for an act of faith, but for an act of reason: verify, using the very tools of your legal expertise, whether the words you utter truly honour the human person, the family, and the freedom of peoples. If they do, Africa and Europe will

walk together. If they do not, no treaty, however well-drafted, will be able to bridge the gulf that ‘betrayed words’ will have carved between us.

Thank you.

* Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship

1. Leo XIV, [Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See](#), 9 January 2026.

2. Dossier on ‘Conditional Aid’ prepared by Pro Vita & Famiglia for the European Parliament Conference, Brussels, 15 July 2026 (internal documentation forming the basis of this address).

3. Ibid.

4. Leo XIV, [Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas* on the protection of the human person in the age of artificial intelligence](#), 15 May 2026.

5. Ibid.

6. Benedict XVI, [Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections, address at the University of Regensburg](#), 12 September 2006.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

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