

I'll try and pick up on the challenge Cardinal Marx just made, and try and start the dialogue straight away from my perspective at the European Commission.

I'm very happy to be in this city again. I spent half of my childhood in this city, a few steps from here. I sold newspapers as a member of the Boy Scouts of America. At the time there was a daily American newspaper in Rome and we could sell it to do some good in our communities. The Boy Scouts of America were run by priests and students of the North American College on the Gianicolo, right here.

I had my confirmation here by a bishop from Western Africa, whom I sought out myself. Because I wanted a confirmation, and at the time my parents didn't have that much attention for the issue. My uncle – who has exactly the same name as I have – was for twelve years the head of the Congregation of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit here in Rome. So my attachment to the city is very strong and it's always a pleasure to be here. It's always important to see the importance of the city and what it represents for the roots of where we are as the European Union.

The highest praise a Roman could get in imperial times was to be called Pontifex, builder of bridges. That is why the Holy Father is also called Pontifex. Why is that the highest grade one could get? Because building bridges is extremely complicated, if you want to do it well and in a lasting way. But it has a huge effect on society if you build bridges over gaps that could not be crossed earlier.

Here, I think, is the problem we face in Europe today. We're in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. This is the worst industrial revolution, in terms of disruption, that humanity has known so far. It will affect every single human being on this planet. No one excluded.

It's an industrial revolution that will change the way we live, the way we work, and it will also change relationships within and between societies. It takes place in a context of a natural environment that can no longer sustain the way we live today. We will need to change that fundamentally as well. And it happens at a time of other great disruptions. The

part we have as Europeans in the world's population is decreasing rapidly. The part we have as a share of the world's economy is decreasing. And there are threats all around us.

I have to say that the Holy Father is a great leader in these times, with ideas on all these issues that could be extremely helpful if they were picked up by wider society. And I hope we can contribute to that.

*Laudato Si* is one of the most inspiring documents that I have read in the last couple of years, which gives for the first time a comprehensive and moral framework for what the challenge of sustainability really is. That is deeply linked with social justice, because claiming larger parts of the natural resources – at the expense of other human beings – goes against the grain of social justice. And we need to correct that. And the Holy Father has put that on the agenda in an inspiring way.

But what, in my view, is the biggest threat I see now for Europe? As a consequence of this fourth industrial revolution – and as a consequence of the financial crisis, the banking crisis, the economic crisis, terrorism crisis, migration crisis – we are now almost in an existential crisis of values.

Over the last years managing all these crises, we've been become excessively pragmatic in communicating about them. Trying to convince people with PowerPoint presentations and graphics, saying: „We're doing better than you think... Yes, you might feel like that, but here are the numbers.” And we've lost many people because of that.

The European Union and our construction is founded on a number of principles. First of all being – after two almost suicidal wars in the last century – „I will make my success dependent on your success.” So it's sort of an extrapolation of the most fundamental principle in Christianity and in most faiths, which is: „I would like to be sure that you will treat me the way I want to be treated. And I will treat you the way you want to be treated.” That is the fundamental principle of Christianity. What else?

This underlies the construction of Europe. So, we no longer thought: „Let's dominate and be happy through domination.” We thought: „Let's share and be happy, through the knowledge that I cannot be happy without my neighbor being happy.”

Apart from all the other discussions about the Judeo-Christian roots of Europe, I think this would be the fundamental principle that we can share also with many other religions and beliefs. This is now under pressure, because of the phenomenon that they call in the financial sector ,moral hazard.'

In other words: now I need to share with my neighbour, but my neighbour doesn't care about me. So when I start sharing with my neighbour, he will take something away from me, and I will be the poorer, and he will profit from that. This is what happened in the economic crisis, where the convergence which was promised didn't happen and divergence happened in our societies. Most of the European nations have seen an increase in difference between rich and poor through the economic crisis and afterwards. So we didn't deliver on our promise of convergence.

It happens in the migration crisis, where some Member States feel completely left alone and others feel imposed upon if they need to take a share of the burden. It happened obviously in the financial crisis. We've seen that.

In the context of what Cardinal Marx said, that now we believe that perhaps our children might be worse off than we were before; if the only perspective you have is loss, you protect what you have. And your neighbor becomes your enemy, not your friend. And this goes to the very fundamental issue of brotherhood or solidarity, for want of a different name. If you want you can call it sisterhood. I don't care, it's the same thing.

Which means that if somebody suffers and I feel optimistic about my future, I will reach out and help the person who suffers. Because I want them to come to my level and beyond. It will help both of us. But if I see somebody suffer and I believe I might suffer too, I will stay away from them like they're lepers because they might infect me. And I think this is what is happening in the European Union today, also between nations.

The caricatures we've seen over the last ten years – in the north about the south, in the south about the north, in the east about the west and vice-versa – are undermining the very idea of European solidarity. We need to fix that.

And I believe as a Christian we do not fix that by creating exclusivity. This is a question I would have to many of you – think about this for once. We cite very often our Judeo-Christian heritage. Do we do that because we're proud of it and we want this to be the basis for a dialogue with others? Or we do it also a bit to exclude those who don't have that heritage from our community and to create divisions? Think about that.

My Christian heritage does not mean anything to me, if it leads to excluding others who don't have the same heritage. That's not Christian in my book. I was brought up, I was educated, and you might have heard this now, by Jesuits and Franciscans, both. That's probably why I'm a socialist today. And you have at least one in the room now. Yes, and I speak like you, I look like you. Not dangerous at all.

What I learned collectively from them is that belief is also linked. Belief is not absolute certainty. It is not: „I know it all” that will get us through the winter. It is: „I learn it all.”

The openness towards people with different views. The willingness to learn from others. The willingness to also check your own beliefs against those of others. Not to refute them. That is what made us strong as a church, when we went all over the world to learn from others. Not just to tell them: „Share our ideas with them.”

Let me end on this please: If you want the European Union to find its second breath, we need to see our heritage as an open invitation, not as something from the past. Because I fear that if we don't do it, we will create more nostalgia, which is quickly becoming the new opium of the people. To quote another Marx.

Nostalgia is like a good wine: it's wonderful in one or two glasses, but not the whole bottle. You lose your way. That is also how I was taught to see our dogmas. Our dogmas as Catholics and Christians are like lamp-posts illuminating a way we can choose. Use them as lampposts, but don't be a drunkard who clutches to a dogma and then doesn't move forward. It helps us communicate with others who don't have our views.

The biggest threat to us as community and as a society is this eternal return of de-humanizing the other. This is a returning feat in two thousand years of European history. We de-humanize the other and then we find the right to exclude them from our society, even to

the point of killing them. We de-humanize them because of their religion, because of their ethnicity, because of their provenance.

If we've learned anything as Christians over the last two thousand years, is to always be able to see the world through the eyes of the other. Even if he's an African refugee floating in a boat in the Mediterranean. Thank you very much.