

# Regaining the meaning of politics in a changing world

## Summary of the address of Standing Committee of the conference of bishops of France to the inhabitants of our country

### **Introduction**

We love our country, it has drastically changed over the last fifty years. We invite for a more profound reflection on the nature of politics. A new foundation is needed.

### **Chapter 1: Recapture the sense of politics**

Political engagement has become discredited because of the attitude of some. Something essential has got lost: the sense of belonging together, of a 'we' that transcends particular interests.

### **Chapter 2: A society under tension**

Tensions have increased with the emergence of social media.

### **Chapter 3: Ambivalences and paradoxes**

Laws and rules have become overwhelming. The precautionary principle is sometimes overstretched. A new equilibrium must be found between illusory maximum security and the essential protection of freedoms. Everybody agrees that this country needs to be reformed profoundly but whenever someone comes forward with a proposal in this direction he is immediately disqualified. Our country reacts by corporatism and by particular interests and nobody is able to breathe in new spirit that gives a new impetus to all.

### **Chapter 4: A social contract to be rethought**

There is wide spread disappointment with a welfare state that doesn't seem to keep its promises. A majority of French has the impression to live in a more and more unjust society. A sentiment of insecurity is fed by acts of incivility and aggression even they remain limited in proportion to the overall population. Young people have difficulties to enter the labor market. By consequence the values of the Republic "Liberté, égalité et fraternité" sound hollow.

### **Chapter 5: Cultural difference and integration**

What does it mean to be a French citizen? How to promote a way of being together that makes sense. Christianity can share its experience of two thousand years of welcoming and integrating different populations and cultures.

### **Chapter 6: Education facing fragile and claimed identities**

The question of identity moves our French society. Who am I really? What makes up our national identity? Our contemporaries need a frame more than armor. Why doesn't integration work? Our educational system is in a crisis.

Christian faith co-exists today with a diversity of other religions and spiritual attitudes. We shouldn't forget where we come from but neither try to create a counterculture.

### **Chapter 7: The question of meaning**

What is the meaning of life? This question has deserted from political debate. Society is in a difficulty to articulate the "Me" and the "We". How to let emerge a "We" that doesn't eliminate the "Me"? The "Living together" of individuals is not possible with a managerial discourse solely. This is true for Europe as well: Nobody is interested in the managerial and commercial discourse the European Union distills today and we risk to forget that the initial project not only allowed peoples to live in peace but also to enrich them mutually. True cohesion does not delete pluralism. A single nation cannot respond to the current challenges. However, the European project needs to be rethought. Saying this is not popular today; we therefore need politically courageous and creative Europeans. Our country has a future in a strong Europe, conscious of its history and its responsibilities in the world.

Beyond that: The only question that really deserves to be asked: Wherefore am I ready to give my life today? In this context it is always important to ask what place is reserved for the weakest. They will show us what is essential. Engagement needs real courage. Also: We need to accept that the time of sowing is not the time of harvesting.

### **Chapter 8: A crisis of the word**

Speaking allows people to tell each other what they value. Lies, corruption, broken promises have heavy consequences. Convictions are necessary but how to advance them in public debate? Compromise is an essential and noble duty of political debate. Catholics cannot be indifferent to anything that touches the human person.

### **Chapter 9: For a the correct understanding of "laïcité"**

There is a narrow and an open version of "laïcité". The latter is a state "laïcité", which provides a legal framework that allows everyone, believers and non-believers to live together. It shouldn't become the narrower project of a "laïcité" of society, where nothing religious can exist in the public sphere.

### **Chapter 10: A country on hold, rich of so many possibilities**

Dialogue of cultures, ecology.... So many positive initiatives exist. At all levels we need to take time to talk and to listen in order to avoid that violence becomes the last word.

### **Conclusion**

Today there is sadness in our country. But there are so many positive signs. We believe that the real solutions to the serious problems of our time will not come from the economy and finance in the first place. They will come from personal and collective listening to the deepest human aspirations of. And from the engagement of all.

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