

From Metz to Brussels: Europe's "good memory"

Pope Leo XIV, Robert Schuman and the call to make Europe's spiritual heritage live

The four-day Apostolic Journey of H.H. Pope Leo XIV to France had a powerful common thread: memory. There is a memory that keeps wounds alive and feeds resentment. And there is a "good memory" that gives the courage to reconcile, forgive and build again.

From UNESCO in Paris to Metz, The Holy Father repeatedly pointed to this second memory – one that becomes responsibility, generosity and peace. At UNESCO, he stressed multilateralism and international law as antidotes to domination and war, calling for dialogue and cooperation. In Metz, at the crossroads of France, Germany and Luxembourg, this message acquired a deeply European resonance.

Robert Schuman: from border to bridge

The choice of Metz was inseparable from Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of European integration. At the Robert Schuman Congress Centre, His Holiness described him as a man who transformed "old dividing lines into bridges of hope" and became an ambassador of **unity in diversity**.

This echoes the recent Vatican News article by H. Em. Mgr. Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg and Ecclesiastical Counsellor of the Luxembourg Chapter of FCAPP, "*Robert Schuman: a man from the borders who built Europe.*" Born in Luxembourg, from a Lorraine family and formed between French and German cultures, the Venerable Robert Schuman learned that defending one's identity need not mean seeing another identity as a threat. The border could become a place of encounter. For Cardinal Hollerich, Robert Schuman was both a man of prayer and a man of action. His faith gave him the courage to transform reconciliation from an ideal into a human and political task.

The courage to break the chain of resentment

At Saint-Étienne Cathedral, the message became even more powerful. Through the images of the desert, the garden and the house, the Pope described peace as both gift and task: the desert, the place of silence and the essential; the garden, where life and beauty flourish; and the house, which requires our shared human effort. Then came a central message: forgiveness is not weakness. In a region marked by successive Franco-German conflicts, Metz and Moselle testify that reconciliation becomes possible when we have the courage to break the chain of resentment.

The Taizé chants, the popular joy, the presence of the Grand Duke – also Honorary President of the World Scout Foundation – Prime Minister of Luxembourg and of Mgr. Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich, the unexpected presence of the President of the French Republic gave the Mass in Metz a particularly moving dimension. In a media environment dominated by images of escalating conflicts, this message of peace felt like a genuine breath of fresh air.

A spiritual heritage to be lived

The Sovereign Pontiff recalled that Europe possesses a spiritual, moral and historical heritage that precedes its political and economic construction: the primacy of the human person, the inviolable dignity of human life, freedom, the family, care for the vulnerable, hospitality towards the stranger and respect for the elderly. This heritage is not a museum piece. Each generation is called to receive it, embody it and transmit it.

Metz itself embodies this history. Pope Leo XIV recalled Saint Chrodegang, the Benedictine spirit of fraternity and sharing, and the role of Metz in spreading Gregorian chant across the Carolingian territories. He also stated that “one cannot speak of Europe without mentioning Christianity”, while stressing that openness to transcendence is not an exclusive confessional claim, but a dimension of the human person and a source of civilisation.

The cathedral offered a striking symbol. Its thousands of square metres of stained glass, enriched by Marc Chagall, a Jewish artist, make the “Lantern of the Good Lord” a remarkable place of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Europe, like the cathedral, does not need uniformity, but the harmony of differences. This resonates with *Magnifica Humanitas* and its call to magnanimity: a spirituality that moves from interiority to action, becoming generosity, service and responsibility. It also gives religions a concrete role: to protect human dignity, serve life, accompany the vulnerable and contribute to peace. The stranger can be not only a perceived threat, but a promise of encounter and enrichment.

Young people: heirs and builders

The Holy Father entrusted a particular responsibility to young people: to become actors and builders of Europe, rejecting violence and oppression, building communities, defending human dignity and engaging responsibly in society. “Do not be afraid of the future,” he told them. The “good memory” thus becomes a living responsibility: remembering not only Europe’s wars and wounds, but also those who overcame them — Robert Schuman and the generation that transformed Franco-German reconciliation into a European project.

From Luxembourg to Metz, from Metz to Brussels

The message directly echoes the reflection launched by the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation (FCAPP) at its first European Conference, held in Luxembourg on 23 January 2026, organised by the Luxembourg Chapter with the Foundation’s Secretariat, the Archdiocese of Luxembourg and COMECE: “Peace Building in Europe: What Role for Catholic Social Thought and Universal Values?” The question was already clear: on what human, spiritual, social and political foundations can peace be built in Europe?

Metz provided a powerful echo: peace requires dignity, dialogue, reconciliation, shared values and the courage to encounter the other. The reflection now continues in Brussels, at the second FCAPP European Conference on 11–12 November 2026, in collaboration with COMECE, on “Peacebuilding in Europe: Political Integration as a Way to Peace.” Luxembourg, Metz, Brussels: three moments in one European reflection — from the

foundations of peacebuilding, to the memory of reconciliation, and towards the political integration needed to preserve peace.

At the end of the Mass, Mgr. Philippe Ballot, Archbishop of Metz, also speaking on behalf of the civil authorities, recalled the path opened by generations who inherited deep Franco-German hatreds but chose reconciliation. He spoke of the shared joy of Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, Speyer, Trier and Namur, all forming part of the cross-border territory of the Greater Region. His message was simple: peace is always born in hearts. The presence in Metz of Grand Duke Guillaume and Grand Duchess Stéphanie of Luxembourg, President Emmanuel Macron, Luxembourg Prime Minister Luc Frieden, as well as European and religious leaders, gave this message a particularly tangible dimension. It brought together, in the same place, those who carry different responsibilities but share a common inheritance: the responsibility to preserve and deepen the peace that previous generations made possible. Bruno Théret, founding member of the Luxembourg Chapter of FCAPP and President of the European Movement-Luxembourg, was also invited to share his perspective on RCF (*Radio Chrétienne de France*).

The question remains:

What will we do with the heritage we have received?

Europe's "good memory" is not a museum. It is a living inheritance — a spiritual and moral capital that asks each generation to make it real through dialogue, reconciliation, generosity and service.

Our task is to become, in our own time, **heirs worthy of Schuman's courage — and to build the bridges that Europe needs, not tomorrow, but today.**

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