



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES (CCEE)
AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (KEK)**

Friday, 20 February 1998

Your Eminence,

*Dear Brothers in Christ,*1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Rome meeting of the Joint Committee of the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE)* and the *Conference of European Churches (KEK)*. Your fraternal meeting and the many expressions of ecumenical reflection, prayer and brotherhood which take place regularly in the different countries of the European continent give me great pleasure. In the light of the Great Jubilee, in which I hope all Christians will take an active part, the sustained attention of all the European Churches to the cause of ecumenism is an encouraging sign on the way to Christian unity.2. The Second Vatican Council gave a new impetus to the ecumenical movement by stressing the importance of the dialogue between brothers and sisters, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thus Christians must show their common charity and their desire for conversion in order to overcome their infidelities, the source and cause of division, and "to live more purely according to the Gospel" (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 7). "The commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 2). To overcome the obstacles and resentments which may still exist, it is fitting to be more and more committed to ecumenical life and prayer, and it is useful to undertake common projects, while respecting the activities developed by the various Christian denominations. Through a constantly strengthened spiritual life, Christian individuals and communities will let themselves be guided by the Spirit, who will lead them to the whole truth and make them bold in their steps. Christ is urging us today more than ever, and "the approaching end of the second millennium demands of everyone an *examination of conscience* and the promotion of fitting ecumenical initiatives" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 34).3. It is fortunate that ecumenical questions are now an integral part of the theological studies in seminaries, ecclesiastical institutions of education and continuing formation. In this way, all those who receive a Christian formation in their own Church will be attentive to whatever can foster Christian unity and they will be eager to take an active part. They will help their brothers and sisters to acquire a better knowledge of the other Christian Churches, which is indispensable for advancing on the path of brotherhood and unity. I am also pleased that the teacher and student exchanges between the different formation centres and Christian denominations have been continued and increased.4. At your meetings, as well as at your gatherings in

Basel and later in Graz, you expressed your concern for the *rapprochement* of the East and West of the European continent, which for too long has been divided and wounded in this century. Called to overcome their fears, the Christian communities of various denominations are now invited to commit themselves courageously to the path that leads to full unity, to make a gift of their spiritual wealth and to share it in a trusting exchange. Christians will thus open the treasures of their spiritual life to the people of our time, who will be able to have a deeper encounter with the Lord. They will also help to gather into unity all God's scattered children, in accordance with the will of Christ himself (cf. Jn 17:11-23). This sharing will doubtless lead to an ever greater respect for particular sensitivities and for the pastoral approach of each Christian confession, rooted in a specific history and specific traditions.⁵ The programme for your meeting includes the study of innovative projects for giving ecumenism greater momentum, by asking yourselves about the method, criteria and content of the new forms of co-operation to be undertaken in the light of past experiences. Through the dialogue between Church leaders, may Europe be the proving ground of an ever more intense search for unity among the Christians of the continent, and more broadly, among all who are dispersed throughout the world, while respecting the truth! Together, Christ's disciples are to proclaim the Gospel explicitly in our contemporary cultures; they must also be concerned to make their contribution to society at the political, economic and social levels, becoming a leaven in building up the continent, with respect for creation and for legitimate autonomy in the conduct of earthly affairs. Europe is currently faced with the issue of welcoming and integrating peoples and communities of other religious traditions, particularly Islam and Asian religions; the Christian Churches must show a spirit of trusting openness and be even more involved in the "dialogue of life", to which I have already had the opportunity of inviting the Catholic faithful and our Muslim brothers and sisters; this dialogue opens the way to the common service of human beings in many areas (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 12). You are working together to meet this challenge and you are encouraging collaboration among the faithful in order to answer the social questions people face today: we cannot forget the conflicts wounding the peoples of our continent, the economic difficulties which weaken families, as well as the attacks on the dignity and rights of individuals and peoples, especially those that harm women and children. "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.... Even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:11, 21). Today, this prayer of the Lord is our prayer. It reminds us that the witness of unity is an essential element of an authentic and profound evangelization. Through their unity in the same Church, Christ's disciples will enable their brethren to discover the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the perfect communion of love. And we must remain restless until that time when, in docility to the Holy Spirit, we fulfil Christ's prayer: "that they may be one!". At the end of our meeting I invoke upon you the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whose fruits are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal 5:22), and who comes to make all things new; I offer you my best wishes for your work and I invoke divine blessings upon you, your coworkers and all who are entrusted to your pastoral care. © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana