



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. CARD. EDWARD IDRIS CASSIDY,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
SECOND EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY
(GRAZ, AUSTRIA, 23-29 JUNE 1997)**

To Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy

President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

1. With this greeting of the Apostle Paul I express my good wishes to you and to the participants in the Second European Ecumenical Assembly taking place at Graz. I ask you kindly to convey the assurance of my prayerful closeness to the Brothers and Sisters of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities of Europe who in the name of the Lord and in a spirit of reconciliation have gathered to hear the word of God calling us to reconciliation and communion. That greeting of Saint Paul to the Corinthians is both a proclamation and a blessing of which Christians of every age have felt the need. It introduces us into the mystery of the redeeming love of God, who loved us so much as to give us his only Son, Jesus Christ. The Redemption accomplished by the Son transformed our relationship with God, not only by conquering sin but by pouring out his grace upon us and establishing a new communion of life: "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10). Christians live in communion with the Father by the power of the forgiveness which they have received through the Cross of Christ.

The theme of the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, reconciliation as "Gift of God and Source of New Life", is indeed timely. As Saint Paul reminds us, reconciliation is God's work (cf. 2 Cor 5:18). It is rightly seen as the foundation of every act of ecclesial and social reconciliation. Reconciliation with God is closely related to and consequent upon reconciliation with others, and in fact the Lord considers the efficacy of the very act of worship itself as dependent upon it. "If you

are offering your gift at the altar" - he says - "and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

2. This Assembly is taking place after intense development in relations and in theological dialogue between Christians, a development which has resulted in a new atmosphere among us. With joy I observe that a particularly valuable result of our contacts and dialogue is the strengthening of our commitment to full unity on the basis of our increased awareness of the elements of faith which we have in common (cf. Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, 49). In a special way, the clearer understanding of the existing elements of communion which has resulted from previous dialogues forms the very basis of this present gathering of Christians with different confessional affiliations. I am confident that your encounter will be a source of great joy as you discern ever more clearly in one another the countenance of the Lord himself and recognize in each other's words the yearning to proclaim together the one faith in Christ.

3. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). Dear Brothers and Sisters, we are called to place ourselves at the service of reconciliation, in all its many aspects. It is not to the credit of Christians to proclaim the message of reconciliation while ourselves remaining divided, and even at times hostile to one another. There is still a need for the purification of our historical memory, marred by the wounds of a confused and sometimes violent past.

Europe has a very special responsibility with regard to ecumenism. It is in Europe that the major divisions between East and West and within the West have arisen. However, it is also in Europe that serious efforts directed towards Christian reconciliation and the search for full visible unity have taken place. This Assembly bears testimony to how much is being achieved in promoting theological dialogue by fostering that spiritual movement known as the dialogue of charity, which creates the conditions in which theological dialogue can evolve with clarity, frankness and mutual trust.

4. At another level, the European continent yearns today for the reconciliation of its peoples and the elimination of divisive social conditions. A more positive relationship has emerged between East and West following the decline of communist regimes. However, new problems and new tensions have also arisen, sometimes expressing themselves violently in open conflict. Christians have a special responsibility in these struggles, for their very spiritual inheritance embodies the spirit of forgiveness and peace.

In a Europe which is seeking not only economic but also political and social cohesion, Christians of the East and West can offer a common yet distinct contribution to the spiritual dimension of the continent. We must neither forget nor mislay the values which Christianity has conferred on the history of Europe. As followers of Christ we must all be deeply convinced that we have a common

responsibility for promoting respect for human rights, for justice and peace, and for what pertains to the sacredness of life. In particular, in the midst of increasing indifferentism and secularization, we are called to bear witness to the values of life and to faith in the Resurrection which embodies the entire Christian message.

May God bless the work of the Assembly, that it may be a tangible expression of our journey towards reconciliation in the name of the Lord. With his help may Christians everywhere be able to celebrate together the start of the Third Millennium and, inspired by our common faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of the world, may we implore from him, with renewed enthusiasm and a deeper awareness, the grace to prepare ourselves, together, to offer the *sacrifice of unity*: for to God the better offering is peace, brotherly concord and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 102).

From the Vatican, 20 June 1997

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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