



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL KURT KOCH, PRESIDENT OF THE
PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 12th INTER-CHRISTIAN SYMPOSIUM
HELD IN THESSALONICA**

To my Venerable Brother

Cardinal Kurt Koch

President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

On the occasion of the 12th Inter-Christian Symposium on the theme: “The Witness of the Church in Today’s World” that will be held in Thessalonica from 30 August to 2 September 2011, I would like to express through you, Venerable Brother, my deep appreciation of this praiseworthy initiative sponsored by the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical University “Antonianum” and by the Theology Department of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at Aristoteles University in Thessalonica.

The theme that will be treated at the Symposium is of great timeliness and is the object of my concern and my prayers, as I said previously in the Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et semper*, with which I established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization.

Down the centuries the Church has never ceased to proclaim the saving mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but today that same proclamation stands in need of fresh vigour in many of the regions which were the first to receive the light, and which are experiencing the effects of a secularization that is capable of impoverishing man in his most profound dimension.

In fact, in the world today, we are witnessing contradictory phenomena: on the one hand widespread indifference is being noted, or even a lack of concern with regard to transcendence; on the other, there are numerous signs that indicate the presence of a deep longing for God in

many peoples' hearts, which is expressed in different ways and impels numerous men and women to set out on a path of sincere seeking.

The cultural, social and financial scenarios are confronting Catholics and Orthodox alike with the same challenges. The reflection that will be developed during the Symposium will therefore have important ecumenical implications. The interventions will make it possible to sketch a structured picture of the common problems and to present the particularities of the different approaches, fostering the exchange of reflections and experiences in an atmosphere of brotherly charity.

Already in itself the reciprocal knowledge of our traditions and sincere friendship makes a contribution to the cause of Christian unity. I would like here to remember the words of my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, when, with regard to evangelization, he said: "As evangelizers, we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church. This is a source of responsibility and also of comfort" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli* *Nuntiandi*, n. 77).

St Paul's intercession will certainly contribute to the success of the meeting. His memory is particularly alive in the city of Thessalonica, in which the Apostle preached the Gospel for the first time, and to which he remained tied by a bond of special love. For a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in the contemporary world we need evangelizers who are motivated by the same apostolic zeal as Paul.

To all those who have contributed to the Symposium, to the distinguished speakers and to all the participants, I extend my cordial greeting and my best wishes for the success of the initiative. I accompany the meeting with my prayers and with my Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 6 August 2011

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