



The Holy See

LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE CARDINAL BASIL HUME

The Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe is having a third ecumenical encounter with the Council of European Churches at Riva del Garda on 4-7 October and will hold a concluding ceremony of ecumenical prayer in the historic cathedral of Trent. I wish to take note of the occasion and to greet you, and all who take part, in the grace and peace which is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (*Phil.* 1, 2), giving thanks for the spirit of love and unity which brings you together.

Your meeting is one of great significance, not only for Christians in Europe, but for divided ecclesial communities throughout the world. So many of the divisions which exist among Christians had their origin in Europe and came to other parts of the world in the wake of the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore the ecumenical responsibility of Europe extends beyond its continental limits and is both heavy and urgent.

You are meeting on the theme, "Confessing our faith together: a source of hope". While you are together you will study, meditate, and proclaim together the core of the faith received from the Apostles, which is expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. May I remind you of what I wrote on the occasion of the 16th Centenary of the Council of Constantinople: "The teaching of the First Council of Constantinople is still the expression of the one common faith of the whole of Christianity. As we confess this faith - as we do every time that we recite the Creed - . . . we wish to loannis Pauli PP. II, *Epistula ad universos ecclesiae Episcopos volvente anno MDC* emphasize the things which unite us with all our brothers, notwithstanding the divisions that have occurred in the course of the centuries" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Epistula ad Universos Ecclesiae Episcopos volvente anno MDC a Concilio Constantinopolitano I necnon MDL a Concilio Ephesino*, I, 1, die 25 mar. 1981: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IV, 1 (1981) 816).

Equally relevant to your meeting are other words from the same letter: "What indeed can more effectively hasten the journey towards unity than the memory and, at the same time, the reliving of that which for so many centuries has been the content of the faith professed in common, indeed which has not ceased to be so, even after the sad divisions which have occurred in the course of centuries?" (*Ibid.*, II, 5: *l.c.*, p. 821).

Jesus Christ wills his Church to be "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"

(*Lumen Gentium*, 4). The communion which he intends for all his followers springs from the one faith and the one baptism (*Eph.* 4, 4-6), even if the still serious divisions among Christians damage it. Because of this real but imperfect communion it is possible and necessary for Christians to bear together before the world a common witness.

I pray that in these days when you are together you will grow towards an ever greater understanding of that Creed which you will proclaim solemnly at the conclusion of your meeting. For a common witness becomes more possible as Christians grow together in professing the one apostolic faith. Their communion in Christ is the power that enables Christians to bear a visible witness together. Your encounter will have indeed been fruitful if you go back to your own countries with a renewed conviction that "in this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 12).

While you are at Riva del Garda you also have an opportunity to help each other find new and effective ways of bearing a common witness appropriate to your own situations, always impelled by a sense of the special accountability which Europe has before the rest of the world. You have spiritual responsibility for Christians in so many countries of Europe who are called, together with followers of Christ everywhere, to engage in mission to the world. It is your task to help them to realize that common witness is part of their faithfulness in mission and to find the right ways to proclaim together to all peoples the Good News of the Kingdom of God. It is important that "we endeavour to do together all that it is possible to do together. It is in doing the truth that we come to the light (*Io.* 3, 21). There is a most urgent need for this common and effective witness of all Christians" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio in pago vulgo «Kehrsatz», apud Bernam, ad homines adscitos in Consilium Communitatum seiunctarum Helvetiae*, habita, 5, die 14 iun. 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 (1984) 1750).

May you be strong for the task ahead of you by the power of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, who is "the faithful witness" (*Apoc.* 1, 5). May his Holy Spirit, who makes present the Gospel truth (*Io.* 14, 26), who establishes communion among believers, who renews and enlivens the Church, give you new energy in proclaiming God's word of hope in the world. May he give you a new will to work for the unity of the human family.

From the Vatican, 1 October 1984.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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