



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMISSION OF EPISCOPATES
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (COMECE)**

Friday, 30 March 2001

Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to each of you who have come to Rome for the spring plenary assembly of the Commission of Episcopates of the European Community. I thank Bishop Josef Homeyer of Hildesheim in particular for his cordial words on your behalf. I also greet the representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the candidate States of the European Union, and the members of the Executive Board of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences, who are taking part in your meeting of study and fellowship. I also extend my thoughts to the priests and lay people who support you generously and competently in your daily mission.

Today's meeting, a sign of the intense and profound communion that binds you to the Successor of Peter, gives me a closer knowledge of your projects and prospects for working with the European Ecclesial Communities. Your Commission intends to treat, from a pastoral perspective, the themes of growing importance related to the responsibilities and activity of the European Union, and to encourage cooperation among the Episcopates in matters of common interest.

2. The process of European integration is progressing, despite some difficulties, and other States are asking to join the Union of the Fifteen. What is being consolidated must not only be a geographical and economic reality for the continent, but must strive above all for a cultural and spiritual understanding forged by the fruitful interaction of many important values and traditions. In a spirit of sharing, the Church continues to make her own specific contribution to this important process of integration. My venerable Predecessors have hailed this process as a sure path to

peace and harmony among peoples, seeing it as a faster way to achieve the "European common good".

Many times I myself have suggested the image of a Europe that breathes with both lungs, not only from the religious but also from the cultural and political standpoint. Since the beginning of my Petrine ministry I have constantly stressed that European civilization must be built on recognition of the "value of the human person and his inalienable basic rights, the inviolability of life, freedom and justice, fellowship and solidarity" (cf. *Address to the 76th Bergedorf Dialogue* on "The Division of Europe and the Possibility of Overcoming This Situation", 17 December 1984; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII/2 [1984], 1607).

3. I also wished to devote two Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops to the Church in Europe, one in 1991 and the other in 1999. Particularly the latter, whose theme was "*Jesus Christ, Alive in His Church, Source of Hope for Europe*", vigorously stressed that Christianity can make a substantial and decisive contribution of renewal and hope to the European continent, offering with renewed enthusiasm the ever timely message of Christ, the only Redeemer of man.

The Church, "by the power of the risen Lord, is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, her sorrows and her difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that she may reveal in the world faithfully ... the mystery of her Lord" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 8). With this in mind, you too, dear brothers and sisters, are called to take up the task of reawakening and cultivating in European Christians the commitment to bear witness to the Gospel of hope. To do this, you will need a new missionary season that involves all the members of the Christian people.

Your Commission and the continent's Episcopates are appropriately dedicating themselves to the religious and cultural formation of the faithful and to the ongoing guidance of those responsible for European unification at all levels. The building of a new Europe, in fact, calls for men and women endowed with human wisdom and a clear sense of discernment based on a sound anthropology that is not detached from a personal experience of divine transcendence.

4. In today's world there is sometimes a conviction that man can create on his own the values he needs. Society would often like to delegate the determination of its goals to rational calculation, technology or majority interest. It must be firmly stressed that the dignity of the human person is rooted in the Creator's plan, so that the rights flowing from it are not subject to the arbitrary interventions of the majority, but must be recognized by all and kept at the centre of every social plan and political decision. Only an integral vision of reality, inspired by perennial human values, can help strengthen a community of freedom and solidarity.

Those responsible for governing, for drafting laws and for administering public affairs must constantly look to the human being and his basic requirements. In this area the Church will not fail

to make her specific contribution. An expert in humanity, she knows that the first task of any society is to protect the authentic dignity of human beings and the common good, as the Second Vatican Council said: "The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 74).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, for this effort to be effective, it must be preceded and accompanied by prayer. It is by humbly and confidently turning to God that we can draw the indispensable light and courage to communicate the Gospel of hope and peace to others. Only by setting out from Christ and his message of salvation is it possible to build the civilization of love. May the Virgin Mary, venerated in so many shrines throughout the European continent, sustain you in your apostolic and missionary work.

With these wishes, as I encourage you to continue your praiseworthy service to the European cause, I cordially bless you all.