



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRD EUROPEAN
ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY ORGANIZED BY
THE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
AND BY THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**

To Cardinal Péter Erdo

President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences

and to Pastor Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont

President of the Conference of European Churches

I joyfully address my greeting to all the Delegates and Participants in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, which is reflecting on an important theme for the new evangelization in Europe: "The light of Christ shines upon all: Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe", and aims to "recognize a new light in the Crucified and Risen Christ, along the road to the reconciliation of Christians in Europe".

I offer my greeting to each one of you, and through you, to the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and the Conference of European Churches. I look to this important meeting in the eager hope that it may help the ecumenical process on its way towards the recomposition of the full and visible unity of all Christians.

Indeed, I have wished to stress this pastoral priority since the very beginning of my Pontificate. If Christ's light is to shine anew upon all human beings, the commitment to seeking the visible unity of all Christians is essential.

With the Second Vatican Council, as my venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II remarked, "the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the "signs of the times" (*Ut Unum Sint*, n. 3).

"To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church" (*ibid.*, n. 9). Aware of this, the Catholic Church will continue confidently on the path of unity and communion between Christians, a difficult path but so full of joy (cf. *ibid.*, n. 2).

How many "signs of the times" have sustained and encouraged us to continue on this route throughout the decades and at the previous European Ecumenical Assemblies in Basle (1989) and Graz (1997), until the signing of the *Charta Oecumenica* in Strasbourg in 2001!

The many ecumenical meetings and celebrations, together with the patient work of theological dialogue at local and international levels, have offered us encouraging signs and have "given us a more vivid sense of the Church as a mystery of unity" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 48).

True dialogue is established where there are not only words but also listening, and where listening leads to encounter, and encounter to relationship, and relationship to understanding, perceived as a deepening and transforming of our Christian being.

Dialogue, therefore, does not only concern the field of knowledge and what we are able to do. Rather, it makes the believer, indeed, the Lord himself, speak in our midst.

Two elements must guide us in our commitment: the dialogue of truth and the encounter in the sign of brotherhood. Both need spiritual ecumenism as their foundation.

The Second Vatican Council had earlier noted: "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 8).

Prayer for unity is the primary route for ecumenism. It enables Christians in Europe to look with new eyes at Christ and at the unity of his Church. It also enables them to face courageously both the sorrowful memories from which European history is not exempt and the social problems in the age of relativism widely predominant today.

In every age, the main builders of reconciliation and unity have been men and women of prayer, among whom belong the numerous witnesses to the faith of all denominations. It was they who inspired divided Christians to seek the path of reconciliation and unity.

We Christians must be aware of the task entrusted to us, which is to bring to Europe and to the world the voice of the One who said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (*Jn* 8: 12). It is up to us to make Christ's light shine on today's people: not our own light, but that of Christ.

Therefore, let us ask God for unity and peace for Europeans and let us show that we are ready to

work together for the true development of European society on the continents of the East and of the West.

I am sure that the Sibiu Meeting will offer precious ideas for pursuing and intensifying Europe's specific vocation, ideas that will then help to create a better future for her peoples.

I hope that the *EEA3* in Sibiu will succeed in making room for the encounter of unity in its legitimate diversity. In an atmosphere of reciprocal trust and in the awareness that our common roots are far deeper than our divisions, it will be possible to shatter false self-sufficiency and to overcome extraneousness with the spiritual experience of the common foundation of our faith.

Europe needs places of encounter and experiences of unity in the faith that are guided by the Spirit. I invoke God so that, through his Spirit, he will make your Meeting at Sibiu just such a place. May Christ's light illuminate the progress of the European Continent! May the Lord bless your families, communities, Churches and all who in every region of Europe profess to be disciples of Christ.

From Castel Gandolfo, 20 August 2007

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