



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II CARDINAL CHRISTOPH SCHÖNBORN,
ARCHBISHOP OF VIENNA ON THE OCCASION
OF THE DAY OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN CATHOLICS***

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Christoph Schönborn
Archbishop of Vienna
President of the Austrian Bishops' Conference*

*Venerable Brother,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. "*Christ: Hope for Europe*": in support of this motto and programme, people from every part of Austria as well as delegations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, have gathered today in the majestic cathedral of Vienna, St Stephen's. With this meeting, you are giving a good start to the Day of Central European Catholics. This Day is intended to help many Christians walk together towards the future in the power of our holy faith, in order to collaborate patiently to heal the wounds inflicted by the unfortunate division of the continent and thus make a dynamic contribution to building Europe, the great common home.

2. At the beginning of my Pontificate almost 25 years ago, I cried to the faithful in St Peter's Square, Rome: "*Open wide the doors to Christ!*". Today I would like you who have gathered in Vienna, this city in the heart of Europe, so important for its historical, cultural and, not least, religious aspects, to take these words to heart once again. Contemplation of Christ instils confidence and hope in us, especially with a view to the future of Europe. If Europe wants to be a reconciled land of individuals and peoples who reciprocate deep respect and lasting kindness, Christ must enlighten this continent! For 2,000 years people who bear his name have left their mark on the rich life and culture of this part of the world. Christians, today and in the future, are still

and will be keen to share in building the societies of Europe. They draw their strength to do so from the Gospel message, which contains and presents eternal values of fundamental importance for both personal and social life. The common journey towards the future will be all the easier once Europeans remember their Christian roots and in them find the parameters for their social and political action. Europe urgently needs to recover its Christian identity and live it anew; only then will it be able to communicate to the world the values on which peace among peoples, social justice and international solidarity are founded.

3. In the European situation today, therefore, we Christians can never tire of speaking courageously of the *Gospel of Hope* which the Church presents to us in a clear and comprehensible way. In the face of resistance to giving God and the Christian faith their rightful place in the public order, the Lord himself is our greatest encouragement. His Word guides us; in the holy sacraments we can always meet him again. With the strength that comes to us from on High, we are ready to respond to all who ask us to account for the hope that is in us (cf. I Pt 3: 15) You are all called, dear Brothers and Sisters, to cooperate, according to your station in life, in the great task that the Church in Europe has set for herself at the beginning of the new millennium: to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of Hope. To strengthen you and your Pastors in this important mission, I will shortly bear witness in a Letter to the hope Christians nourish for the new Europe.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters! The Day of Central European Catholics invites you to set out together for the great shrines and places of pilgrimage in your country on the "path of reconciliation". In this way, you will strengthen one another in your faith and your witness to Christ, our true hope who never disappoints us. You will thus be able to cooperate with all people of good will in building a new Europe. In doing so, trust in the words of Mary, Mother of Jesus: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2: 5). Indeed, those who let Christ guide them are laying solid foundations for a society familiar with the words "truth", "justice", "freedom" and "peace". I willingly encourage you to take this path, often hardgoing, of being together and for others, which next year will take you to Mariazell in a "Pilgrimage of Peoples". May the Blessed Virgin Mary - the "*Magna Mater Austriae, Magna Domina Hungarorum, Alma Mater Gentium Slavorum*" - intercede lovingly for us at the throne of God and guide us safely to Jesus Christ, our Hope! As I accompany you in spirit on this pilgrimage, I cordially impart to you all my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, Solemnity of Pentecost, 2003

JOHN PAUL II
