



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX DELEGATION
SENT BY H. B. CHRISTODOULOS**

Monday, 11 March 2002

*Your Excellencies,
Dear Brothers in Christ,*

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (II Cor 1,2).

1. With St Paul's greeting to the Christians of Corinth, I joyfully welcome you in the hope of a future rich with brotherly relations and communion.

I am deeply grateful to His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and of All Greece, for sending you to Rome as messengers of peace following the fraternal meeting I had with him when I was on pilgrimage to the *Areopagus* in the blessed footsteps of the Apostle Paul.

2. Reciprocal personal acquaintance, the exchange of information and a frank dialogue on the ways of establishing relations between our Churches are the indispensable premise for being able to progress in a spirit of ecclesial brotherhood. They are also the essential conditions for establishing the collaboration, that will enable Catholics and Orthodox together to offer a living witness to their common Christian inheritance. This is needed today in our society when the conformity of human life with the Gospel is disappearing, just as one sees declining the acceptance of the value of Gospel teaching calling for respect for the human person and his dignity, created as he is in the image and likeness of God, along with justice, charity and the search for the truth.

3. In the framework of the progress that is taking place on our continent the hour for collaboration has arrived! Keeping in mind the necessity of a *new evangelization* of Europe that will enable it to

revive its deep Christian roots, the Eastern and Western traditions, that are both based on the one, great Christian tradition and on the apostolic Church, must rely on the charism of St Maximus the Confessor who was himself a bridge between the two traditions of East and West, and knew how to follow the practice of *sympathos* in order to confront the questions of the world. It is also incumbent on us to confront these questions dynamically and positively, strong in the hope that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, will inspire us to find the solutions.

Our mission is to transmit the Christian patrimony that we have inherited. Thus there is an ever more urgent need for Christians to set an example for society by common behaviour rooted in their faith. They should seek together to find a remedy for the serious ethical problems posed by science and by methods that wish to prescind from a reference to the transcendental dimension of man or even to deny it. In the end it means emphasizing our duty, as the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece and I did last year, to "do everything in our power, so that the Christian roots of Europe and its Christian soul may be preserved intact" (*Common Declaration at the Areopagus of Athens*, n. 6, 4 May 2001).

4. By the masterly way she has preserved her heritage of faith and Christian life, the Orthodox Church of Greece has a special responsibility in all this. During my stay in Athens, I recalled that "the name of Greece resounds wherever the Gospel is preached.... From the apostolic era until now, the Orthodox Church of Greece has been a rich source from which the Church of the West too has drawn her liturgy, spirituality and jurisprudence" (*Address to Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece*, n. 3, 4 May 2001). In our responsibility that consists in tending toward the *ecumenism of holiness* that, with the help of God, will eventually lead us to full communion - meaning neither absorption nor fusion, but a coming together in truth and love (cf. *Slavorum apostoli*, n. 27) - we must organize our collaboration and work together to make the voice of the Gospel resound forcefully throughout the Europe that is ours where the Christian roots of the peoples must be revived.

5. In this season that brings us to Easter, the Feast of Feasts, which sadly we will not be able to celebrate on the same date, we Catholics and Orthodox are all the same united in the proclamation of the *Kerygma* of the Resurrection. This proclamation which we wish to deliver together will give people today a reason to live and hope; our will to seek communion with each other will be able to inspire in civil society an ideal of fairminded collaboration.

6. As I thank you for your very kind visit, I ask you to convey my warm greetings to His Beatitude Christodoulos, to the members of the Holy Synod and to all the Christian faithful of Greece.

Repeating again the words of St Paul, that concluded our Common Declaration in Athens, I ask the Lord to direct our way "so that we may increase and abound in love for one another and for all men".

May the grace and peace of God accompany you on your visit and enable you to experience the sincere and fraternal charity with which the Holy See and the Bishop of Rome welcome you!

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana