



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 26 January 2006*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you with joy and I thank you for coming. I greet each one of you and through you I greet the Bishops' Conferences, Communities and Ecumenical Institutions of Europe. I extend a special greeting to the Presidents of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and of the Conference of European Churches and I thank them for expressing your fraternal sentiments.

Your visit is a further opportunity to shed light on the ties of communion that bind us in Christ and to renew our desire to work together to achieve full unity as soon as possible.

I am especially pleased to meet you once again today, after taking part yesterday in the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in St Paul's Basilica. You have desired to set out on the European ecumenical pilgrimage, which will culminate in the meeting at Sibiu, Romania, in September 2007, from this very spot: Rome, where the Apostles Peter and Paul preached and were martyred.

This is all the more significant because the Apostles first proclaimed to us that Gospel which we are called as Christians to proclaim and witness to in Europe today.

In order to make this proclamation more effective, we wish to continue our courageous journey in search of full communion. The theme you have chosen for this spiritual programme - "*The light of Christ enlightens all: The hope of renewal and unity in Europe*" - demonstrates that this is Europe's true priority: to work to make Christ's light radiate and illuminate with renewed energy the steps of the European Continent at the beginning of the new Millennium.

I hope that Christ's light will illuminate every stage of this pilgrimage and that the next European Ecumenical Assembly will help make the Christians of our countries more aware of their duty to witness to the faith in today's cultural context, often marked by relativism and indifference. This is an indispensable service to offer to the European Community which has extended its frontiers in recent years.

Indeed, for the success of the unification process on which it has embarked, Europe needs to rediscover its Christian roots, making room for the ethical values that are part of its vast, consolidated spiritual heritage. As disciples of Christ, it is our lot to help Europe become aware of this special responsibility in connection with its peoples. Only if we have the courage and determination, however, to take the path of reconciliation and unity will our Christian presence be incisive and enlightening.

The question that my beloved Predecessor John Paul II asked himself in his Homily at the Ecumenical Celebration for the First Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops on 7 December 1991 is alive in my mind: "*In a Europe which is proceeding towards political unity can we accept that the very Church of Christ is a factor of division and discord? Would this not be one of the greatest scandals of our time?*" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 9 December 1991, n. 6, pp. 1-2).

How important it is to find in Christ the light to make headway on the path to unity! This effort is demanded of us all, dear representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of Europe, because we all have a specific responsibility for the ecumenical progress of Christians on our Continent and in the rest of the world.

After the fall of the Wall that divided the countries of East and West in Europe, the encounter between peoples is easier; there are more opportunities to increase our reciprocal knowledge and esteem with an enriching mutual exchange of gifts; and we feel the need to join forces to face the great challenges of the present day, starting with those of modernity and secularization.

Experience amply shows that sincere, brotherly dialogue generates trust, eliminates fear and preconceived notions, dissolves difficulties and opens people to serene and constructive comparison.

Dear friends, for my part I renew here the determination I expressed at the beginning of my Pontificate to take on as a priority commitment and to spare no effort in the task of rebuilding the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers.

I thank you again for your welcome visit and I ask God to accompany with his Spirit your preparations for the next European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu.

May the Lord bless your families, Communities and Churches, and all those in every region of Europe who proclaim themselves to be disciples of Christ.

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