



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ECUMENICAL MEETING
"TOGETHER FOR EUROPE"
HELD IN STUTTGART (GERMANY)**

To the participants in the Ecumenical Meeting "Together for Europe"

On 8 May, in Stuttgart, the Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox movements are coming together at the *Together for Europe* Meeting to celebrate a European Day of Encounter and Dialogue. It gives me great joy to learn that, precisely when new States are being welcomed into the European Union, Christians in Europe are gathering to reflect on the Christian roots and the future of their Continent in the light of the Gospel. In fact, the light of the Gospel has shone in Europe's history, giving life to an association of different cultures and destinies. Reference to the living Word of the Gospel often led entire peoples to share a common culture and purpose, just like the community that has taken the name of Europe.

Here it is not a question of distant history. When we speak of Christianity in Europe, we also refer to its more recent past, its present and its future. The process of European unification was the outcome of the bitter defeat the Second World War represented for humanity. Consequently, the "fathers" of European unity, the majority of whom identified with the Christian faith, started the unification process whose fruits we are gathering today. Europe began to bring reconciliation and peace to nations that had unfortunately fought one another for centuries. The Holy See supported European integration from the outset, while insisting, as I recently recalled, that for "such a union to be valid and lasting, it is necessary first of all to go back to Christianity as a factor that creates identity and unity" (*Address for the Conferral on the Holy Father of the International Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen*, Germany, 24 March 2004, n. 4: *L'Osservatore Romano* English Edition [ORE], 14 April 2004, p. 9).

The Christian faith, however, also represents the present and future of Europe. In Stuttgart, with the enthusiasm of their Christian faith and their European awareness, many members of religious movements are showing their confidence in a future of Europe illumined by the Gospel. The multitude of witnesses to the faith who died, victims of the bloody and distressing persecutions in European history in the 20th century, constitute a common heritage for the Christian denominations. May this heritage strengthen the desire for unity among European Christians and their commitment to further the task of evangelization!

To create a more human society, lovingly open in solidarity to others, we must not tire of opening our hearts to the Gospel. The Christian members of numerous religious movements that have gathered in Stuttgart witness to the fact that the Gospel has led them to overcome selfish nationalism and see Europe as a family of peoples, rich in cultural differences and historical experiences, but at the same time united by a sort of joint destiny. This is the knowledge that tomorrow's Europe needs in order to participate in the great events to which history calls it.

The ecumenical dialogue makes a crucial contribution to developing a European awareness based on the Christian faith. This dialogue is also the focus of the Stuttgart meeting, during which Catholics will discuss with Evangelical and Orthodox Christians the common issues of life on the European Continent. Through their painstaking and respectful dialogue, these movements make an important contribution to strengthening the Lord's commandment of love among Christians.

Yet a united Europe cannot think only of itself and withdraw into its own boundaries and well-being. Europe is called to serve the world, especially its poorest and most forgotten regions, such as Africa in particular, which is scarred by so many serious problems. It is impossible to build a common European house without concern for the general good of humanity: "One could say that the condition for building Europe's future is to be capable of looking beyond its boundaries, especially towards the immense southern hemisphere, which for centuries has been the area where the most numerous conflicts have arisen and where injustice weighs in a manner that can no longer be borne" (*Message to Cardinal Edward Cassidy on the Occasion of the "Prayer Meeting for Peace" in the World Held in Brussels, Belgium, 13-15 September, 10 September 1992; ORE, 23 September 1992, p. 1*).

Europe needs the commitment and enthusiasm of Christians, especially the youngest, if it is to receive the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, "at the beginning of a new millennium, the necessity of a renewed effort on the part of believers to respond to the challenge of the new evangelization is urgently required. In this vision an important role is entrusted to Ecclesial Movements" (*Message to Chiara Lubich for the 60th Anniversary of the Focolare Movement*, 4 December 2003; *ORE, 7 January 2004, p. 2*).

The new evangelization gives a soul to Europe and helps the Continent no longer to live for itself and within its own boundaries, but to build a more humane humanity, respectful of life, and to be a

generous presence on the world scene.

I gladly impart my Blessing to the Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart as well as to the Bishops and priests present at the "Together for Europe" Meeting in Stuttgart. At the same time, I greet all the participants in this important Meeting, the movements that organized it and all those who are united with them in dialogue and prayer. I pray to the almighty and loving God to bless the work of all who spread the Gospel in Europe, and to grant us all a time of peace and solidarity.

From the Vatican, 6 May 2004

JOHN PAUL II

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