

POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC
EXHORTATION
ECCLESIA IN EUROPA



OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II

TO THE BISHOPS, MEN AND WOMEN IN
THE CONSECRATED LIFE AND ALL THE
LAY FAITHFUL ON JESUS CHRIST ALIVE IN
HIS CHURCH, THE SOURCE OF HOPE FOR
EUROPE.

INTRODUCTION

A proclamation of joy for Europe

1. The Church in Europe was closely united to her Bishops as they gathered in Synod a second time and contemplated *Jesus Christ, alive in his Church, the source of hope for Europe*.

This is a theme which I too wish to proclaim to all the Christians of Europe at the beginning of this third millennium, as I join my Brother Bishops in repeating the words of the First Letter of Saint Peter : “Have no fear, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (3 :14-15).¹

This proclamation resounded throughout the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The Synod was celebrated on the eve of the Jubilee and was closely connected with that event, serving as a kind of door opening upon the Jubilee.² The Jubilee itself was “one unceasing hymn of praise to the Trinity”, an authentic “journey of reconciliation” and a “sign of true hope for all who look to Christ and to his Church”.³ Bequeathing to us the joy of a living encounter

¹ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 1 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

² Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 90-91 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 - Suppl., 17-18.

with Christ, “the same yesterday, today and for ever” (*Heb* 13 :8), it once again set before us the Lord Jesus as the one unshaken foundation of authentic hope.

A second Synod for Europe

2. From the outset, a deeper appreciation of the theme of hope was the principal goal of the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops. As the last of a series of continental Synods celebrated in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000,⁴ its purpose was to analyze the situation of the Church in Europe and to offer guidance in promoting a new proclamation of the Gospel, as I emphasized when I announced its convocation on 23 June 1996, at the conclusion of the Eucharist celebrated at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin.⁵

The synodal Assembly had to take up, re-examine and study the issues which surfaced in the preceding Synod for Europe, which was held in 1991, following the collapse of the walls, on the theme : “That we may be witnesses of Christ who has set us free”. That first Special Assembly emphasized the urgent need for a “new evangelization”, in the awareness that “Europe

³ John Paul II, Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium* (29 November 1998), 3-4 : AAS 91 (1999), 132, 133.

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38 : AAS 87 (1995), 30.

⁵ Cf. *Angelus Address* (23 June 1996), 2 : *Insegnamenti* XIX/1 (1996), 1599-1600.

today must not simply appeal to its former Christian heritage : it needs to be able to decide about its future in conformity with the person and message of Jesus Christ”.⁶

Nine years later, the conviction that “the Church has the urgent task of bringing the liberating message of the Gospel to the men and women of Europe”⁷ once more emerged with compelling force. The theme chosen for the new synodal Assembly set forth that same challenge, this time from the standpoint of hope. There was a need, in other words, to proclaim this message of hope to a Europe which seems to have lost sight of it.⁸

The experience of the Synod

3. The synodal Assembly, which met from 1 to 23 October 1999, was a precious *opportunity for encounter, listening and dialogue* : it enabled Bishops from different parts of Europe to have a better knowledge of one another and of the Successor of Peter. As a group we were able to support and inspire one another, thanks above all to the witness of those who under the former totalitarian regimes endured harsh and prolonged persecutions on account of their faith.⁹ Once again we experienced moments of communion in

⁶ Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Declaration* (13 December 1991), 2 : *Ench. Vat.* 13, No. 619.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3, loc.cit., 621.

⁸ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 3 : *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 - Suppl., 3.

faith and charity, led by a desire to bring about a fraternal “exchange of gifts” and mutually enriched by the diversity of each other's experiences.¹⁰

This led in turn to a readiness to hear the call which the Spirit makes to the Particular Churches in Europe to face new challenges with decision.¹¹ With a *loving gaze* the participants in the Synod did not hesitate to look at *the present reality of the Continent*, noting both its light and its shadows. There was a clear recognition that the current situation is marked by grave uncertainties at the levels of culture, anthropology, ethics and spirituality. There was also a clear and growing desire to understand more deeply and to interpret this situation in order to see the tasks which await the Church: what resulted were “useful orientations to make the face of Christ increasingly more visible through a more incisive proclamation confirmed by a consistent witness”.¹²

4. The Synod experience, lived with evangelical discernment, also led to a growing *awareness of the unity that*, without denying the

⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Homily for the Concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (23 October 1999), 1 : AAS 92 (2000), 177.

¹⁰ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

¹¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Homily for the Concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (23 October 1999), 4 : AAS 92 (2000), 179.

¹² *Ibid.*

differences derived from historical situations and events, *links the various parts of Europe*. It is a unity which, rooted in a common Christian inspiration, is capable of reconciling diverse cultural traditions and which demands, at the level of both society and Church, a constant growth in mutual knowledge open to an increased sharing of individual values.

Throughout the Synod, *a powerful impulse towards hope gradually became evident*. While taking seriously the analyses of the complexity characterizing the Continent, the Synod Fathers saw that possibly the most urgent matter Europe faces, in both East and West, is a growing need for hope, a hope which will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together. All the reflections of the Synod were geared towards responding to this need, taking as their starting-point *the mystery of Christ and the Trinity*. The Synod wished to set forth once more the figure of Jesus, alive in his Church, who reveals God as Love, a communion of the three divine Persons.

The icon of the Book of Revelation

5. In this Post-Synodal Exhortation I am pleased to be able to share with the Church in Europe the fruits of this Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops. In this way I intend to respond to the desire expressed at the end of the synodal Assembly,

when the Fathers gave me the texts of their reflections and asked me to offer to the pilgrim Church in Europe a document on the theme of the Synod.¹³

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches” (*Rev* 2 :7). In proclaiming to Europe the Gospel of hope, I will take as a guide the *Book of Revelation*, a “prophetic revelation” which discloses to the community of believers the deep and hidden meaning of what is taking place (cf. *Rev* 1 :1). The Book of Revelation sets before us a word addressed to Christian communities, enabling them to interpret and experience their place in history, with all its questions and its tribulations, in the light of the definitive victory of the Lamb who was slain and who rose from the dead. At the same time, it sets before us a word which calls on us to live in a way which rejects the recurring temptation to construct the city of man apart from God or even in opposition to him. For should this ever happen, human society itself would sooner or later meet with irreversible failure.

The Book of Revelation contains a word of encouragement addressed to believers : beyond all appearances, and even if its effects are not yet seen, the victory of Christ has already taken place and is final. This in turn causes us to approach human situations and events with an attitude of

¹³ Cf. *Propositio* 1.

fundamental trust, born of faith in the Risen One, present and at work in history.

CHAPTER ONE. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR HOPE

“Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one” (Rev 1 :17-18)

The Risen One is always with us

6. At a time of persecution, tribulation and bewilderment for the Church (cf. *Rev 1 :9*), the message resounding throughout the vision of the writer of the Book of Revelation is a *message of hope* : “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one, I died and behold I am alive for ever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (*Rev 1 :17-18*). We thus find ourselves before the Gospel, the “good news”, that is *Jesus Christ himself*. He is *the First and the Last* : in him all history finds its beginning, its meaning, its direction and its fulfilment. In him and with him, in his death and resurrection, everything has already been said. He is the *Living One* : once he was dead yet now he lives for ever. He is *the Lamb* standing before the throne of God (cf. *Rev 5 :6*) : *sacrificed*, because he shed his blood for us on the wood of the Cross. He *is standing*, because he has come back to unending life and has shown us the infinite power of the Father's love. He *holds in his hands the seven stars* (cf *Rev 1 :16*), the persecuted Church of God, which struggles against evil and sin, yet nonetheless has every

right to be joyful and victorious since she is in the hands of the One who has already triumphed over evil. He *walks among the seven golden lampstands* (cf. *Rev 2 :1*), for he is present and active in his Church at prayer. He is also “*the one who comes*” (*Rev 1 :4*), thanks to the Church's mission and the activity throughout human history ; he will come as the eschatological reaper, at the end of time, in order to bring all things to completion (cf. *Rev 14 :15- 16 ; 22 :20*).

I. Challenges and signs of hope for the Church in Europe

The dimming of hope

7. This message is also addressed *today* to the Churches in *Europe, often tempted by a dimming of hope*. The age we are living in, with its own particular challenges, can seem to be a time of bewilderment. Many men and women seem disoriented, uncertain, without hope, and not a few Christians share these feelings. There are many *troubling signs* which at the beginning of the third millennium are clouding the horizon of the European continent, which “despite great signs of faith and witness and an atmosphere undoubtedly more free and unified, feels all the weariness which historical events – recent and past – have brought about deep within the hearts of its peoples, often causing disappointment”.¹⁴

¹⁴ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 - Suppl., 2-3.

Among the aspects of this situation, so many of which were frequently mentioned during the Synod,¹⁵ I would like to mention in a particular way *the loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage*, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history. It is no real surprise, then, that there are efforts to create a vision of Europe which ignore its religious heritage, and in particular, its profound Christian soul, asserting the rights of the peoples who make up Europe without grafting those rights on to the trunk which is enlivened by the sap of Christianity.

Certainly Europe is not lacking in prestigious symbols of the Christian presence, yet with the slow and steady advance of secularism, these symbols risk becoming a mere vestige of the past. Many people are no longer able to integrate the Gospel message into their daily experience ; living one's faith in Jesus becomes increasingly difficult in a social and cultural setting in which that faith is constantly challenged and threatened. In many social settings it is easier to be identified as an agnostic than a believer. The impression is given

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 12-13, 16-19, loc. cit., 4-6 ; *Idem, Relatio ante disceptationem, I : L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 6-7 ; *Idem, Relatio post disceptationem, II, A : L'Osservatore Romano*, 11-12 October 1999, 10.

that unbelief is self-explanatory, whereas belief needs a sort of social legitimization which is neither obvious nor taken for granted.

8. This loss of Christian memory is accompanied by a kind of *fear of the future*. Tomorrow is often presented as something bleak and uncertain. The future is viewed more with dread than with desire. Among the troubling indications of this are the inner emptiness that grips many people and the loss of meaning in life. The signs and fruits of this existential anguish include, in particular, the diminishing number of births, the decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the difficulty, if not the outright refusal, to make lifelong commitments, including marriage.

We find ourselves before a widespread *existential fragmentation*. A feeling of loneliness is prevalent ; divisions and conflicts are on the rise. Among other symptoms of this state of affairs, Europe is presently witnessing the grave phenomenon of family crises and the weakening of the very concept of the family, the continuation or resurfacing of ethnic conflicts, the re-emergence of racism, interreligious tensions, a selfishness that closes individuals and groups in upon themselves, a growing overall lack of concern for ethics and an obsessive concern for personal interests and privileges. To many observers the current process of globalization,

rather than leading towards the greater unity of the human race, risks being dominated by an approach that would marginalize the less powerful and increase the number of poor in the world.

In connection with the spread of individualism, we see an *increased weakening of interpersonal solidarity*: while charitable institutions continue to carry out praiseworthy work, one notes a decline in the sense of solidarity, with the result that many people, while not lacking material necessities, feel increasingly alone, left to themselves without structures of affection and support.

9. At the root of this loss of hope is an *attempt to promote a vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ*. This sort of thinking has led to man being considered as “the absolute centre of reality, a view which makes him occupy – falsely – the place of God and which forgets that it is not man who creates God, but rather God who creates man. Forgetfulness of God led to the abandonment of man”. It is therefore “no wonder that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism – and even a cynical hedonism – in daily life”.¹⁶ European culture gives

¹⁶ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, I, 1.2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 6.

the impression of “silent apostasy” on the part of people who have all that they need and who live as if God does not exist.

This is the context for those attempts, including the most recent ones, to present European culture with no reference to the contribution of the Christian religion which marked its historical development and its universal diffusion. We are witnessing the emergence of a *new culture*, largely influenced by the mass media, whose content and character are often in conflict with the Gospel and the dignity of the human person. This culture is also marked by an widespread and growing religious agnosticism, connected to a more profound moral and legal relativism rooted in confusion regarding the truth about man as the basis of the inalienable rights of all human beings. At times the signs of a weakening of hope are evident in disturbing forms of what might be called a “culture of death”.¹⁷

An irrepensible yearning for hope

10. Yet, as the Synod Fathers made clear, “*man cannot live without hope*: life would become meaningless and unbearable”.¹⁸ Often those in need of hope believe that they can find peace in fleeting and insubstantial things. In this way, *hope*,

¹⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 5a.

¹⁸ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 1 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

restricted *to this world* and closed to transcendence, is identified, for example, with the paradise promised by science or technology, with various forms of messianism, with a hedonistic natural felicity brought about by consumerism, or with the imaginary and artificial euphoria produced by drugs, with certain forms of millenarianism, with the attraction of oriental philosophies, with the quest for forms of esoteric spirituality and with the different currents of the *New Age* movement.¹⁹

All these, however, show themselves profoundly illusory and incapable of satisfying that yearning for happiness which the human heart continues to harbour. The disturbing signs of growing hopelessness thus continue and intensify, occasionally manifesting themselves also in forms of aggression and violence.²⁰

Signs of hope

11. No human being can live without looking towards the future. How much more so the Church, which lives in expectation of the Kingdom yet to come and already present in this world. It would be unjust not to acknowledge *the signs* of the influence of *Christ's Gospel* in the life of societies. The Synod Fathers sought them out and emphasized them.

¹⁹ *Propositio* 5a. Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Jesus Christ The Bearer of the Water of Life. A Christian Reflection on the New Age*, Vatican City, 2003.

²⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 5a.

These signs must include the recovery of freedom of the Church in Eastern Europe, with its new possibilities for pastoral activity; the concentration of the Church on her spiritual mission and her primary commitment to evangelization, also with regard for social and political realities; the growing missionary awareness on the part of all the baptized in the variety and complementarity of their gifts and their tasks, and the increased presence of women in the life and structures of the Christian community.

A community of peoples

12. If we look at Europe as a civil community, *signs of hope* are not lacking: when we consider these signs with the eyes of faith, we can perceive, even amid the contradictions of history, the presence of the Spirit of God, who renews the face of the earth. At the conclusion of their labours, the Synod Fathers described these signs in the following way: "We joyfully recognize the growing *openness* of peoples to one another, the *reconciliation* between countries which have been hostile and at enmity with each other for a long time, the progressive *opening up* to the countries of Eastern Europe in the process of seeking deeper unity. Mutual recognition, *forms of cooperation and exchanges* of all sorts are being developed in such a way that little by little, a culture, indeed a *European consciousness*, is being created. This we

hope will encourage, especially among the young, a sense of fraternity and the will to share. We note as a very positive factor that the whole of this process is developing according to *democratic procedures*, in a peaceful way and in the spirit of *freedom* which respects and fosters legitimate diversity, encouraging and sustaining the process leading to the *growing unity of Europe*. We welcome with satisfaction all that has been done to safeguard the conditions and ways to respect *human rights*. Finally, in the context of the legitimate economic and political unity in Europe, while acknowledging the signs of hope seen by the attention given to the *rights and to the quality of life*, we sincerely hope that, in creative fidelity to the humanist and Christian traditions of our continent, there will be a guarantee of the primacy of *ethical and spiritual values*.”²¹

Martyrs and witnesses to the faith

13. I intend, however, to draw particular attention to some of the signs which have emerged in the life of the Church herself. In the first place, together with the Synod Fathers, I want to point out to everyone, so that it will never be forgotten, that great sign of hope represented by the many *witnesses to the Christian faith* who lived in the last century, in both East and West. They found suitable ways to proclaim

²¹ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 6 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

the Gospel amid situations of hostility and persecution, often even making the supreme sacrifice by shedding their blood.

These witnesses, and particularly those who suffered martyrdom, are an eloquent and magnificent sign which we are called to contemplate and to imitate. They show us the vitality of the Church ; they stand before us as a light for the Church and for humanity because they caused the light of Christ to shine in the darkness ; to the extent that they came from different religious traditions, they also shine forth as a sign of hope for the journey of ecumenism, in the certainty that their blood “is also a vital source of unity for the Church”.²²

Even more radically, they tell us that *martyrdom* is the supreme incarnation of the Gospel of hope : “In this way, martyrs proclaim 'the Gospel of hope' and bear witnesses to it with their lives to the point of shedding their blood, because they are certain that they cannot live without Christ and are ready to die for him in the conviction that Jesus is the Lord and the Saviour of humanity and that, therefore, only in him does mankind find true fullness of life. According to the exhortation of the Apostle Peter, their example shown them ready to give reason for the hope that is in them (cf. *1 Pt 3 :15*). Furthermore,

²² John Paul II, *Angelus Address* (25 August 1996), 2 ; *Insegnamenti XIX/2* (1996), 237 ; cf. *Propositio 9*.

martyrs celebrate the 'Gospel of hope', because the offering of their lives is the greatest manifestation of the living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which constitutes true spiritual worship (cf. *Rom* 12 :1), and the source, soul and summit of every Christian celebration. Finally, martyrs serve the 'Gospel of hope', because they express in their martyrdom a love and service of humanity to a high degree insofar as they demonstrate that obedience to the law of the Gospel begets a moral and societal life which honours and promotes the dignity and freedom of every person".²³

The holiness of many

14. One fruit of the conversion brought about by the Gospel is the *holiness* of so many men and women in our time : not only those whom the Church has officially proclaimed saints, but all those who with simplicity and amid the circumstances of their daily lives testified to their fidelity to Christ. How can one not think of the countless sons and daughters of the Church who throughout Europe's history have lived lives of generous and authentic holiness in the hiddenness of their family and their professional and social lives? "All of them like 'living stones' adhering to Christ 'the cornerstone', have built Europe as a spiritual and moral edifice, leaving a

²³ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 88 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 - Suppl., 17.

most precious inheritance to the future generations. 'The Lord Jesus promised : 'He who believes in me will also do the works that I do ; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father'' (*Jn* 14 :12). The saints are living proof of the fulfilment of this promise, and they encourage the belief that this is possible in the most difficult hours of history''²⁴

The parish and ecclesial movements

15. The Gospel continues to bear fruit in parish communities, among consecrated persons, in lay associations, in groups devoted to prayer and the apostolate and in various youth communities, as well as through the presence and growth of new movements and ecclesial realities. In each of them the one Spirit finds ways of awakening renewed dedication to the Gospel, generous openness to the service of others, and a Christian life marked by Gospel radicalism and missionary zeal.

In today's Europe too, both in the post-Communist countries and in the West, *the parish*, while in need of constant renewal,²⁵ continues to maintain and to carry out its particular mission, which is indispensable and of great relevance for pastoral care and the life of the Church. The

²⁴ John Paul II, *Homily during the Concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (23 October 1999), 4 : AAS 92 (2000), 179.

²⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 26 : AAS 81 (1989), 439.

parish is still a setting where the faithful are offered opportunities for genuine Christian living and a place for authentic human interaction and socialization, whether in the situations of dispersion and anonymity typical of large modern cities or in areas which are rural and sparsely populated.²⁶

16. At the same time, together with the Synod Fathers, I express my great esteem for the presence and activity of the different apostolic associations and organizations, and for Catholic Action in particular. I also wish to note the significant contribution that, in fellowship with other ecclesial realities and never in isolation from them, they can offer to *new movements and to new ecclesial communities*. Such groups, in fact, “help Christians to live a more radically evangelical life. They are a cradle for different vocations, and they generate new forms of consecration. Above all, they promote the vocation of the laity, and they help it to find expression in different spheres of life. They favour the holiness of the people. They are able to be both the messenger and the message for people who otherwise would not encounter the Church. Frequently they promote the journey of ecumenism and they open the ways to interreligious dialogue. They are an

²⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 21.

antidote to the spread of sects and an invaluable aid to the spread of joy and life in the Church”.²⁷

The journey of ecumenism

17. We give thanks to the Lord for the great and consoling sign of hope which is *the progress made in the journey of ecumenism* under the standard of truth, charity and reconciliation. This is of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit for a continent like Europe which gave rise to tragic divisions between Christians during the second millennium and which still suffers from their consequences.

I am moved as I remember certain moments of great intensity experienced during the synodal labours and the unanimous conviction, also expressed by the Fraternal Delegates, that this journey – despite the problems which remain and the new ones which are emerging – cannot be halted, but rather must continue with renewed enthusiasm, with deeper determination and with a humble openness to mutual forgiveness on the part of all. I readily agree with some of the observations made by the Synod Fathers, since “the progress in ecumenical dialogue, which has its deepest source in the same Word of God, represents a sign of great hope for the Church of today : the growth of unity among Christians is, in fact mutually enriching for all”.²⁸ We need to “look with joy at the progress that has so far been

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Propositio* 9.

made in the dialogue both with our brethren of the Orthodox Churches and with those of the Ecclesial Communities born of the Reformation, recognizing in them a sign of the working of the Spirit, for which we must praise and thank the Lord”.²⁹

II. Returning to Christ, the source of all hope

Confessing our faith

18. From the synodal Assembly there emerged the clear and passionate certainty that the Church has to offer Europe the most precious of all gifts, a gift which no one else can give : faith in Jesus Christ, the source of the hope that does not disappoint ;³⁰ a gift which is at the origin of the spiritual and cultural unity of the European peoples and which both today and tomorrow can make an essential contribution to their development and integration. After twenty centuries, the Church stands at the beginning of the third millennium with a message which is ever the same, a message which constitutes her sole treasure : Jesus Christ is Lord ; in him, and in no one else, do we find salvation (cf. *Acts* 4 :12). Christ is the source of hope for Europe and for the whole world, “and the Church is the channel

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 4, 1.

in which the grace pouring from the pierced Heart of the Saviour flows and spreads”.³¹

This confession of faith causes our hearts and lips to raise “a joyful *confession of hope* : 'Risen and living Lord, you are the new hope of the Church and of humanity. You are the one true hope for the human family and for history. Already in this life, and in the life to come you are “among us the hope of glory” (*Col 1 :27*). In you and with you, we find truth : our life has meaning, communion is possible, diversity can become richness, and the power of the kingdom is at work in history and helps to build the city of mankind. Love gives an eternal value to human efforts. Suffering becomes salvific, life will conquer death, creation will share in the glory of the children of God' ”.³²

Jesus Christ our hope

19. Jesus Christ is our hope because he, the Eternal Word of God, who is always with the Father (cf. *Jn 1 :18*), loved us so much that he assumed our human nature in all things but sin and shared in our life, for the sake of our salvation. The profession of this truth stands at the very heart of our faith. The loss of the truth about Jesus Christ, or a failure to comprehend

³¹ John Paul II, *Homily during the Concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (23 October 1999), 2 : AAS 92 (2000), 178.

³² Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

that truth, prevent us from appreciating and entering into the mystery of God's love and the Trinitarian communion.³³

Jesus Christ is our hope because *he reveals the mystery of the Trinity*. This is the core of the Christian faith, and it can still make a significant contribution, as it has in the past, to the creation of structures which, inspired by the great values of the Gospel or measuring itself against them, are capable of promoting the life, history and culture of the different peoples of the Continent.

Many are the spiritual roots underlying the recognition of the value of the human person and his inalienable dignity, the sacredness of human life and the centrality of the family, the importance of education and freedom of thought, speech and religion, the legal protection of individuals and groups, the promotion of solidarity and the common good, and the recognition of the dignity of labour. These roots have helped lead to the submission of political power to the rule of law and to respect for the rights of individuals and peoples. Here we should mention the spirit of ancient Greece and Rome, the contributions of the Celtic, Germanic, Slav and Finno-Ugric peoples and the influence of Jewish and Islamic culture. Yet it must be acknowledged that these inspiring principles have historically found in the Judeo-Christian tradition

³³ Cf. *Propositio* 4, 2.

a force capable of harmonizing, consolidating and promoting them. This is a fact which cannot be ignored ; on the contrary, in the process of building a united Europe there is a need to acknowledge that this edifice must also be founded on values that are most fully manifested in the Christian tradition. Such an acknowledgment is to everyone's advantage.

The Church “is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution” for Europe, and for this reason she consistently desires to respect the legitimate autonomy of the civil order.³⁴ Nevertheless, she has the task of reviving faith in the Trinity among the Christians of Europe, knowing full well that this faith is the herald of authentic hope for the continent. Many of the great paradigms of reference mentioned above, which are at the core of European civilization, have their deepest roots in the Church's trinitarian faith. This faith contains an extraordinary spiritual, cultural and ethical potential which is also capable of shedding light on some of the more important questions discussed in Europe today, such as social disintegration and the loss of a meaningful point of reference for life and history. Hence the need

³⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 47 : AAS 83 (1991), 852.

for a renewed theological, spiritual and pastoral meditation on the mystery of the Trinity.³⁵

20. The Particular Churches in Europe are not simple agencies or private organizations. Rather, they carry out their work with a specific institutional dimension that merits legal recognition, in full respect for just systems of civil legislation. In their self-reflection, Christian communities need to appreciate anew that they are a gift which God has given for the enrichment of the peoples living on the continent. This is the joyful message that they are called to bring to every person. In coming to a deeper appreciation of their own essential missionary dimension, they must constantly testify that Jesus Christ “is *the one and only mediator of salvation for all of humanity*. Only in him do humanity, history and the cosmos find their definitively positive meaning and receive their full realization : he has in himself in his life and in his person the definitive reason of salvation. He is not only the mediator of salvation but salvation's very source”.³⁶

Consequently, in the context of the ethical and religious pluralism which increasingly characterizes Europe, there is a need to profess and proclaim the truth of Christ as the one Mediator between God and men and the one

³⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 4, 1.

³⁶ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 30 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 - Suppl., 8.

Saviour of the world. Therefore, in union with the whole Church, I invite my brothers and my sisters in faith – as I did at the end of the synodal Assembly – constantly to be open in trust to Christ and to allow themselves to be renewed by him, proclaiming to all people of good will in the power of peace and love that whoever encounters the Lord comes to know the Truth, discovers the Life, and finds the Way leading to it (cf. *Jn* 14 :6 ; *Ps* 15 :11). From the tenor of life and the witness of Christians, the inhabitants of Europe will come to discover that Christ is the future of man. In the faith of the Church, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (*Acts* 4 :12).³⁷

21. For believers, Jesus Christ is the hope of every person because *he grants eternal life*. He is “the Word of life” (*1 Jn* 1 :1), who came to the world so that men and women “may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10 :10). He shows us that the true meaning of man's existence does not remain confined within the horizons of this world, but opens instead upon eternity. The mission of each Particular Church in Europe is to take note of every person's thirst for truth and the need for authentic values which can enliven the people living on the continent. With renewed

³⁷ John Paul II, *Homily during the Concluding Mass of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (23 October 1999), 3 : AAS 92 (2000), 178 ; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), 13 : AAS 92 (2000), 754.

energy, each Particular Church must again bear witness to the newness which is its life. This means initiating a well-structured cultural and missionary outreach, demonstrating by action and by convincing arguments how the new Europe needs to rediscover its ultimate roots. In this context, all those who are inspired by the values of the Gospel have an essential role to play, which is part of the solid foundation for building a more humane and peaceful coexistence respectful of one and all.

The Particular Churches in Europe need to restore to hope its primordially eschatological thrust.³⁸ True Christian hope, in fact, is theological and eschatological, founded on the Risen One who will come again as Redeemer and Judge and who calls us to resurrection and our eternal reward.

Jesus Christ alive in his Church

22. By returning to Christ, the peoples of Europe will be able to rediscover the hope which alone can give full meaning to life. Today too they can discover that hope, for *Jesus is present, alive and at work in his Church*. He is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn* 15 :1ff. ; *Gal* 3 :28 ; *Eph* 4 :15-16 ; *Acts* 9 :5). In the Church, by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit, he unceasingly continues his saving work.³⁹

³⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 5.

With the eyes of faith we are enabled to see the mysterious presence of Jesus in the different signs that he has left us. He is present first of all in Sacred Scripture, which everywhere speaks of him (cf. *Lk* 24 :27, 44-47). Yet in a unique way he is present in the Eucharist. This “presence is called 'real' - by which it is not intended to exclude all other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense : that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present”.⁴⁰ In the Eucharist, in fact, “is contained *truly, really* and *substantially* the Body and the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with his soul and divinity, and therefore the whole Christ”.⁴¹ “Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith”.⁴² Also real is the presence of Jesus in the other liturgical actions of the Church, which she celebrates in his name. Among these are the

³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 7 : AAS 78 (1986), 816 ; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), 16 : AAS 92 (2000), 756-757.

⁴⁰ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965) : AAS 57 (1965), 762-763. Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 9 : AAS 59 (1967), 547 ; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1374.

⁴¹ Ecumenical Council of Trent, *Decretum De ss. Eucharistia*, can. 1 : DS 1651 ; cf. cap. 3 : DS 1641.

⁴² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 15 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 April 2003, 2.

Sacraments, actions of Christ which he carries out at the hands of men.⁴³

Jesus is also present in the world in other very real ways, and especially through his disciples who, in fidelity to the twin commandment of love, worship God in Spirit and truth (cf. *Jn* 4 :24) and testify by their lives to the fraternal love that sets them apart as followers of the Lord (cf. *Mt* 25 :31-46 ; *Jn* 13 :35 ; 15 :1-17).⁴⁴

CHAPTER TWO. THE GOSPEL OF HOPE ENTRUSTED TO THE CHURCH OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

“Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death” (Rev 3 :2)

I. The Lord calls to conversion

Jesus speaks today to our Churches

23. “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the golden lampstands..., the first and the last, who died and came to life..., the Son of God” (*Rev* 2 :1,8,18). It is *Jesus himself who speaks to his Church*. His message is addressed to all the individual

⁴³ Cf. Saint Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, Tractatus VI, cap. I, 7 : PL 35, 1428 ; Saint John Chrysostom, *In Proditionem Iudae, hom. I, 6* : PG 49, 380C.

⁴⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7 ; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 50 ; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965) : AAS 57 (1965), 762-763 ; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 9 : AAS 59 (1967), 547 ; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1373-1374.

Particular Churches and concerns their inner life, which is at times marked by the presence of ideas and ways of thinking incompatible with the Gospel tradition, frequently subjected to different forms of persecution and, what is yet more dangerous, beset by troubling symptoms of worldliness, the loss of an earlier faith, and compromise with the “logic” of the world. Not infrequently communities have lost their first love (cf. *Rev* 2 :4).

One sees how *our ecclesial communities* are struggling with weaknesses, weariness and divisions. They too need to hear anew the voice of the Bridegroom, who invites them to conversion, spurs them on to bold new undertakings and calls forth their commitment to the great task of the “new evangelization”. The Church must constantly submit to the judgment of Christ's word and live her human reality in a state of purification, so as to be ever more perfectly the Bride without spot or wrinkle, adorned with fine linen, bright and pure (cf. *Eph* 5 :27 ; *Rev* 19 :7-8).

In this way *Jesus Christ is calling our Churches in Europe to conversion*, and they, with their Lord and by the power of his presence, are becoming bearers of hope for humanity.

The work of the Gospel throughout history

24. *Europe has been widely and profoundly permeated by Christianity.* “There can be no doubt that, in Europe's complex history, Christianity has been a central and defining element, established on the firm foundation of the classical heritage and the multiple contributions of the various ethnic and cultural streams which have succeeded one another down the centuries. The Christian faith has shaped the culture of the Continent and is inextricably bound up with its history, to the extent that Europe's history would be incomprehensible without reference to the events which marked first the great period of evangelization and then the long centuries when Christianity, despite the painful division between East and West, came to be the religion of the European peoples. Even in modern and contemporary times, when religious unity progressively disintegrated as a result both of further divisions between Christians and the gradual detachment of cultures from the horizon of faith, the role played by faith has continued to be significant”.⁴⁵

25. *The Church's concern for Europe* is born of her very nature and mission. Down the centuries the Church has been closely linked to our continent, so that Europe's spiritual face gradually took shape thanks to the efforts of great

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Spes Aedificandi* (1 October 1999), 1 : AAS 92 (2000), 220.

missionaries, the witness of saints and martyrs, and the tireless efforts of monks and nuns, men and women religious and pastors. From the biblical conception of man Europe drew the best of its humanistic culture, found inspiration for its artistic and intellectual creations, created systems of law and, not least, advanced the dignity of the person as a subject of inalienable rights.⁴⁶ The Church, as the bearer of the Gospel, thus helped to spread and consolidate those values which have made European culture universal.

With all this in mind, the Church of today, with a renewed sense of responsibility, is conscious of the urgency of not squandering this precious patrimony and of helping Europe to build herself by revitalizing her original Christian roots.⁴⁷

Showing the true face of Church

26. The entire Church in Europe ought to feel that the Lord's command and call is addressed to her : examine yourself, be converted, "awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death" (*Rev 3 :2*). The need to do so is also born of a consideration of the present time : "The serious situation of indifference towards religion on the part of so many

⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Polish Parliament, Warsaw* (11 June 1999), 6 : *Insegnamenti*, XXII/1 (1999), 1276.

⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Address during the Departure Ceremony at Krakow Airport* (10 June 1997), 4 : *Insegnamenti* XX/1 (1997), 1496-1497.

Europeans, the presence of many people even on our continent who do not yet know Jesus Christ and his Church and who are not baptized, the secularism which poisons a wide spectrum of Christians who habitually think, make decisions and live, 'as if Christ did not exist', far from extinguishing our hope, make this hope more humble and more able to trust in God alone. It is from his mercy that we receive *the grace and call to conversion*".⁴⁸

27. Although at times, as in the Gospel episode of the calming of the tempest (cf. *Mk* 4 :35-41 ; *Lk* 8 :22-25), it can appear that Christ is asleep and leaves his barque to be tossed by the tumultuous waves, the Church in Europe is called to *grow in the certainty that the Lord*, through the gift of his Spirit, *is ever present and at work in her midst and in all human history*. He prolongs his mission throughout time and makes the Church a stream of new life coursing through the life of humanity as a sign of hope for all.

In a context where a temptation to activism is also attractive at the pastoral level, Christians in Europe must continue to *be a transparent image of the Risen Christ, living in close communion with him*.

There is a need for communities which, by contemplating and imitating the Virgin Mary, the figure and model of the Church in faith and

⁴⁸ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, No. 4 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

holiness,⁴⁹ cultivate the sense of liturgical life and of interior life. Before all and above all, they should praise the Lord, worship him and hear his Word. Only in this way will they be able to partake of his mystery and live totally in relation to him as members of his faithful Bride.

28. In the face of recurring impulses to division and opposition, the different Particular Churches in Europe, strengthened also by their bond with the Successor of Peter, must be committed to *being a true locus and means of communion* for the whole People of God in faith and love.⁵⁰ They should therefore foster a climate of fraternal charity, lived with Gospel radicalism in the name of Jesus and in his love ; they should create cordial relationships, communication, shared responsibility and participation, missionary consciousness, concern and readiness to serve. They should be prompted by attitudes of esteem, acceptance and mutual correction (cf. *Rom* 12 :10 ; 15 :7-14), as well as of service and reciprocal support (cf. *Gal* 5 :13 ; 6 :2), mutual forgiveness (cf. *Col* 3 :13), and mutual edification (cf. *1 Thes* 5 :11). They need to set in place a pastoral programme which by maximizing all legitimate diversity would also foster ready

⁴⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 15, 1 ; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 773 ; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 27 : AAS 80 (1988), 1718.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 15, 1.

cooperation among individuals and groups. They need to revitalize participatory bodies as valuable instruments of communion aimed at a united missionary activity, and enabling the emergence of adequately trained and qualified pastoral workers. In this way, the Churches themselves, enlivened by the communion which is the manifestation of God's love, the ground and reason for the hope which does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5 :5), will be a more brilliant reflection of the Trinity, as well as a challenging sign which invites belief (cf. *Jn* 17 :21).

29. If communion in the Church is to be experienced more fully, there is a need to *make the most of the variety of charisms and vocations* which increasingly converge on unity and can enrich it (cf. 1 Cor 12). In this regard, the new movements and the new ecclesial communities must “abandon every temptation to claim rights of primogeniture and every mutual incomprehension”, advance along the path of more authentic communion between themselves and with all other ecclesial realities, and “live with love in full obedience to the Bishops”. But it is also necessary for the Bishops “to show them that fatherhood and that love which are proper to Pastors” ⁵¹and to acknowledge, maximize and coordinate their charisms and their presence for the building up of the one Church.

⁵¹ *Propositio* 21.

Thanks to an increase in cooperation between the different ecclesial bodies under the loving leadership of their pastors, the whole Church will be able to present to all a more beautiful and credible face, a clearer and more evident reflection of the Lord's own face, and will then be able to give new hope and comfort both to those who seek her and to those who, even though not seeking her, nonetheless need her.

In order to respond to the Gospel's call to conversion, “we must join in making a humble and courageous *examination of conscience*, in order to acknowledge our fears and our mistakes, sincerely confess our slowness to believe, our omissions, our infidelities and our faults”.⁵² Far from fostering an attitude of hopelessness and discouragement, the evangelical acknowledgment of one's sins will surely awaken within the community the experience of each one of the baptized : the joy of profound liberation and the grace of a new beginning which will enable it to set out with greater vigour upon the path of evangelization.

Advancing towards Christian unity

30. Finally, the Gospel of hope is also a forceful summons to *conversion in the field of ecumenism*. In the conviction that Christian unity corresponds to the Lord's prayer “that they may

⁵² Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, No. 4 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

all be one” (cf. *Jn* 17 :11), and that it is essential today for greater credibility in evangelization and the growth of European unity, all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities need to “be assisted and encouraged to see the journey of ecumenism as a 'travelling together' towards Christ”⁵³ and towards the visible unity which he wills, so that unity in diversity may shine forth within the Church as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the builder of communion.

If this is to happen, there is need for patient and persevering commitment on the part of all, a commitment inspired both by genuine hope and sober realism, aimed at “the enhancing of all that already unites us, sincere reciprocal esteem, the elimination of prejudice, knowledge and mutual love”.⁵⁴ Consequently, the pursuit of unity, in order to have a firm basis, cannot fail to include the passionate search for truth through dialogue and discussion which can acknowledge the progress already made and consider it an incentive for even greater progress in resolving the disagreements which continue to divide Christians.

31. *Dialogue must continue with firm resolve*, undaunted by difficulties and hardship. It should be carried on “under different aspects (doctrinal, spiritual and practical), following the logic of the

⁵³ *Propositio* 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

exchange of gifts which the Spirit awakens in every Church ; it should train the community and the faithful, and young people in particular, to experience moments of encounter and to make ecumenism, rightly understood, an ordinary dimension of ecclesial life and activity”.⁵⁵

Such dialogue represents one of the chief concerns of the Church, especially in this Europe, which in the last millennium witnessed the rise of all too many divisions between Christians and which is today moving towards greater unity. We may not halt on this journey nor may we turn back! We need to continue this journey in a spirit of trust, so that mutual respect, the search for truth, cooperation in charity and above all the ecumenism of holiness, will not fail, with God's help, to bear fruit.

32. Despite the inevitable difficulties, I ask everyone to acknowledge and appreciate, in love and fraternity, the contribution which the *Eastern Catholic Churches* can offer for a more genuine building up of unity ⁵⁶ through their very presence, the richness of their tradition, the witness of their “unity in diversity”, the inculturation which they have accomplished in their proclamation of the Gospel, and the diversity of their rites. At the same time I wish to assure once more the pastors and our brothers

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 22.

and sisters of the Orthodox Churches that the new evangelization is in no way to be confused with proselytism, without prejudice to the duty of respect for truth, for freedom and for the dignity of every person.

II. The whole Church is sent on mission

33. Serving the Gospel of hope by means of a charity which evangelizes is *the commitment and the responsibility of everyone*. Whatever the charism and ministry of each individual, charity is the royal road prescribed for all and which all can travel: it is the road upon which the whole ecclesial community is called to journey in the footsteps of its Master.

The commitment of ordained ministers

34. In a special way priests are called by virtue of their ministry to celebrate, teach and serve the Gospel of hope. Through the Sacrament of Orders which configures them to Christ the Head and Shepherd, Bishops and priests must conform their whole life and all their activity to Jesus. By the preaching of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and their leadership of the Christian community, they make present the mystery of Christ, and in the exercise of their ministry “they are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the One High Priest,

embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care”.⁵⁷

As men who are “in” the world yet not “of” the world (cf. *Jn* 17 :15-16), priests are called in Europe's present cultural and spiritual situation to be a sign of contradiction and of hope for a society suffering from “horizontalism” and in need of openness to the Transcendent.

35. In this context *priestly celibacy* also stands out as the sign of hope put totally in the Lord. Celibacy is not merely an ecclesiastical discipline imposed by authority ; rather it is first and foremost a grace, a priceless gift of God for his Church, a prophetic value for the contemporary world, a source of intense spiritual life and pastoral fruitfulness, a witness to the eschatological Kingdom, a sign of God's love for this world, as well as a sign of the priest's undivided love for God and for his people.⁵⁸ Lived in response to God's gift and as a mastery of the temptations of a hedonistic society, it not only leads to the human fulfilment of those who are called to embrace it, but proves to be a source of growth for others as well.

Celibacy is esteemed in the whole Church as fitting for the priesthood,⁵⁹ obligatory in the Lat-

⁵⁷ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 15 : AAS 84 (1992), 679-680.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 29, loc. cit., 703-705 ; *Propositio* 18.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches*, can. 373.

in Church ⁶⁰ and deeply respected by the Eastern Churches.⁶¹ In the present cultural context, it stands out as an eloquent sign which needs to be cherished as a precious good for the Church. A revision of the present discipline in this regard would not help to resolve the crisis of vocations to the priesthood being felt in many parts of Europe.⁶² A commitment to the service of the Gospel of hope also demands that the Church make every effort to propose celibacy in its full biblical, theological and spiritual richness.

36. We cannot fail to see that the exercise of the sacred ministry today is fraught with many difficulties on account of the prevailing culture and the lessened numbers of priests, together with the increase of pastoral responsibilities and the fatigue which this can involve. Consequently, all the more *esteem, gratitude* and *support* is due to those priests who carry out with praiseworthy dedication and fidelity the ministry which they have received.⁶³

To these priests, making my own the words of the Synod Fathers, I also wish to offer, with confidence and gratitude, my own *encouragement* :

⁶⁰ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 277,1.

⁶¹ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* (24 June 1967), 40 : AAS 59 (1967), 673.

⁶² Cf. *Propositio* 18.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

“Do not lose heart and do not allow yourselves to be overcome with weariness! In full communion with us Bishops, persevere in your invaluable and indispensable ministry in joyful fraternity with your brother priests, in generous collaboration with those in consecrated life and with all the lay faithful”.⁶⁴

Together with priests I also wish to mention *deacons*, who share, albeit to a different degree, in the one Sacrament of Holy Orders. Sent forth in service to ecclesial communion, they exercise, under the leadership of the Bishop and his presbyterate, the “*diakonia*” of liturgy, word and charity.⁶⁵ In their own way, *they are at the service of the Gospel of hope.*

The witness of consecrated persons

37. Particularly eloquent is the witness of *consecrated persons*. In this regard, acknowledgment must first be made of the fundamental role played by monasticism and consecrated life in the evangelization of Europe and in the shaping of its Christian identity.⁶⁶ This role must continue to be played today, at a time when a “new evangelization” of the continent is urgently needed and, with the creation of more complex structures and relationships, it stands at a critical

⁶⁴ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, No. 4 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

⁶⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 29.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 19.

turning point. Europe will always need the holiness, prophetic witness, evangelizing activity and service of consecrated persons. Attention also needs to be paid to the specific contribution which Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life can make thanks to their aspiration to transform the world from within through the power of the Beatitudes.

38. The specific *contribution* which consecrated persons can make to the Gospel of hope *takes as its starting-point several characteristics of the present-day cultural and social face of Europe.*⁶⁷ The demand for new forms of spirituality, now making itself felt throughout society, needs to find a response in the *acknowledgment of God's absolute primacy* which consecrated persons experience in their total gift of self and their permanent conversion in a life offered up as true spiritual worship. In an atmosphere poisoned by secularism and dominated by consumerism, consecrated life, as a gift of the Spirit to the Church and for the Church, becomes an ever greater sign of hope to the extent that it testifies to life's transcendent dimension. In today's multicultural and multireligious world, there is also a demand for the witness of that *evangelical fraternity* which characterizes the consecrated life and makes it a stimulus to purifying and integrating different values through the reconciliation of divisions.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

The presence of new forms of poverty and marginalization ought to call forth that creativity in *the care of those most in need* which has marked so many founders of Religious Institutes. Finally, the tendency to a certain self-absorption can find an antidote in the readiness of consecrated persons to continue *the work of evangelization on other continents*, despite the decrease of numbers in various Institutes.

Concern for vocations

39. Since the commitment of ordained ministers and consecrated persons is decisive, some mention must be made of the disturbing shortage of seminarians and aspirants to religious life, especially in Western Europe. This situation calls for everyone to be involved in an *effective pastoral programme of promoting vocations*. “Whenever the person of Jesus Christ is presented clearly to young people, he inspires in them a hope that motivates them to abandon everything in order to follow him in response to his call, and to bear witness to him among their peers”.⁶⁸ The pastoral care of vocations is thus a vital issue for the future of the Christian faith in Europe and, in turn, for the spiritual advancement of the very peoples who inhabit the continent. It is a challenge which must be met by a Church which

⁶⁸ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, III : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 9.

wishes to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of hope.⁶⁹

40. To create a much-needed pastoral programme of promoting vocations, it is beneficial to explain to the laity the Church's faith regarding the nature and dignity of the ministerial priesthood ; to encourage families to live as true "domestic churches", so that in their midst the variety of vocations can be discerned, accepted and nurtured ; and to engage in pastoral work aimed at helping young people in particular to choose a life rooted in Christ and completely dedicated to the Church.⁷⁰

In the certainty that the Holy Spirit is still at work today, and that the signs of his presence are not lacking, it is mainly a question of *making the promotion of vocations a part of ordinary pastoral care*. There is a need "to rekindle a deep yearning for God, especially in young people, thus creating a suitable context in which generous vocational responses can be made" ; it is urgent that a great movement of prayer spread across the ecclesial Communities of the European continent, since "changed historical and cultural situations demand that the pastoral care of vocations be perceived as one of the primary objectives of the entire Christian community".⁷¹ It is also indispensable for priests themselves to live and

⁶⁹ *Propositio* 17.

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

work in a way consistent with their true sacramental identity. For if the image they project is unclear or indifferent, how can they attract young people to imitate them?

The mission of the laity

41. The contribution of the *lay faithful* to the life of the Church is essential: they have an irreplaceable role in the proclamation and the service of the Gospel of hope, since “through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and of love”.⁷² As full sharers in the Church's mission in the world, they are called to testify that the Christian faith constitutes the only complete response to the questions which life sets before every individual and every society, and they are able to imbue the world with the values of the Kingdom of God, the promise and guarantee of a hope which does not disappoint.

Europe yesterday and today has experienced the presence of *important and illustrious examples* of such lay persons. As the Synod Fathers emphasized, grateful mention must be made especially of those men and women who have and who continue to bear witness to Christ and his Gospel by their service to public life and the

⁷¹ John Paul II, *Address to the Participants in the Congress on the Theme “New Vocations for a New Europe”* (9 May 1997), 1-3 : *Insegnamenti* XX/1 (1997), 917-918.

⁷² John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 7 : AAS 81 (1989), 404.

responsibilities which this entails. It is supremely important “to prompt and sustain specific vocations to serve the common good : persons who after the example and manner of many so-called 'Fathers of Europe' can be builders of tomorrow's European society, establishing it on a firm spiritual foundation”.⁷³

Equal esteem is due to the work carried out by Christian lay persons, often in the hidden-ness of daily life, through humble acts of service capable of proclaiming God's mercy to the poor ; we must be grateful to these men and women for their fearless witness of charity and forgiveness, values which bring the Gospel to the vast frontiers of politics, social life, the economy, culture, ecology, international life, family life, education, professional life, the world of labour and the caring professions.⁷⁴ This calls for *programmes of training* capable of preparing suitable lay persons to apply their faith in temporal affairs. These programmes, based on a serious introduction to the Church's life and particularly the study of her social doctrine, ought to be able to provide them not only with teaching and encouragement, but also with adequate grounding in spirituality in order to strengthen their

⁷³ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, No. 82 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999, 16.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 29.

commitment, lived as an authentic path to holiness.

The role of women

42. The Church is very much aware of the specific contribution of *women* in service of the Gospel of hope. The history of the Christian community demonstrates that women have always had an outstanding place in bearing witness to the Gospel. Mention must be made of how much they have done, often in silence and obscurity, to receive and pass on the gift of God through physical and spiritual motherhood, education, catechesis, the accomplishment of great charitable works, through the life of prayer and contemplation, and through mystical experiences and writings rich in the wisdom of the Gospel.⁷⁵

In the light of their splendid and powerful witness in the past, the Church expresses her confidence in all that women are capable of doing today for the growth of hope at every level. There are aspects of contemporary European society which represent a challenge for women's capacity to receive, share and bring to birth in love, with determination and generosity. One thinks, for example, of the prevalent scientific and technical mind-set which eclipses the areas of affectivity and emotional life, the lack of generosity, the widespread fear of giving life to new children, the

⁷⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 30.

difficulty of relating with others and of accepting those who are different. It is in this context that the Church looks to women for the life-giving contribution of a new wave of hope.

43. For this to happen, however, the dignity of women must be promoted above all *in the Church*, inasmuch as woman and man enjoy equal dignity, for both have been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen 1 :27*) and each has been given proper and specific gifts.

It is to be hoped, as the Synod emphasized, that the full participation of women in the Church's life and mission will be fostered by making better use of their gifts and by entrusting them with ecclesial roles reserved by law to laypersons. There must also be a due appreciation of women's mission as wives and mothers and their dedication to family life.⁷⁶

The Church has not failed to raise her voice in denunciation of injustice and the violence perpetrated against women wherever and however this occurs. She demands that laws protecting women be enforced, and that effective measures be taken against the demeaning portrayal of women in advertising and against the scourge of prostitution. She also expresses the hope that the domestic work done by mothers will be considered, like that of fathers, as a

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

contribution to the common good, even through forms of financial retribution.

CHAPTER THREE. PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

“Go, take the scroll which is open... take it and eat”
(Rev 10 :8.9)

I. Proclaiming the mystery of Christ

Revelation gives meaning to history

44. The vision of the Book of Revelation tells us of “a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals” and held “in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne” (Rev 5 :1). This writing contains the God's plan of creation and salvation, his detailed design for all things, for persons, things and events. No created being, on earth or in heaven, is able to “open the scroll or to look into it” (Rev 5 :3) so as to understand its contents. In the confusion of human affairs, *no one is able to declare the unfolding of the future and the ultimate meaning of things.*

Only Jesus Christ gains possession of the sealed scroll (cf. Rev 5 :6-7) ; only he is “worthy to take the scroll and open its seals” (Rev 5 :9). *Only Jesus is able to reveal and bring about the plan of God hidden therein.* Left to himself, man is not capable of giving meaning to history and to human affairs : life remains without hope. Only the Son

of God is able *to dispel the shadows and to show the way*.

The open scroll is given to John and, through him, to the whole Church. John is told to take the book and to eat it : “Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land... take it and eat it” (*Rev* 10 :8-9). Only when he has assimilated it deeply will he be able to communicate it properly to others, to whom he is sent with the order to “prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” (*Rev* 10 :11).

The urgent need for proclamation

45. The Gospel of hope, received and assimilated by the Church, calls for daily proclamation and witness. This is the proper vocation of the Church in every time and place. It is also the mission of the Church in Europe today. For “evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. The Church exists in order to evangelize, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection”.⁷⁷

Church in Europe, the “new evangelization” is the task set before you! Rediscover the

⁷⁷ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 14 : AAS 68 (1976), 13.

enthusiasm of proclamation. Hear today, addressed to you at the beginning of this third millennium, the plea heard at the beginning of the first millennium, when a man of Macedonia appeared in a vision to Paul and begged him : “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” (*Acts* 16 :9). Even if it remains unexpressed or even repressed, this is the most profound and genuine plea rising from the hearts of Europeans today, who yearn for a hope which does not disappoint. This hope has been bestowed on you as a gift which must then be joyfully given away in every time and place. *Let the proclamation of Jesus*, which is the Gospel of hope, *be your boast and your whole life*. Carry on with renewed zeal in the same missionary spirit which, down these twenty centuries, beginning with the preaching of the Apostles Peter and Paul, has inspired so many holy men and women, the Saints who were authentic evangelizers of the European continent.

A first proclamation and a renewed proclamation

46. In various parts of Europe *a first proclamation of the Gospel is needed* : the number of the unbaptized is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism, either as a result of the Communist domination

or the spread of religious indifference.⁷⁸ Indeed, Europe is now one of those traditionally Christian places which, in addition to a new evangelization, require in some cases a first evangelization.

The Church cannot shirk the responsibility of making a courageous diagnosis which will make it possible to decide on appropriate therapies. On the “old” continent too, there are vast social and cultural areas which stand in need of a true *missio ad gentes*.⁷⁹

47. Everywhere, then, *a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptized*. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus. The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a vague religiosity lacking real commitment; various forms of agnosticism and practical atheism are spreading and serve to widen the division between faith and life; some

⁷⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 3b.

⁷⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 282-286.

people have been affected by the spirit of an immanentist humanism, which has weakened the faith and often, tragically, led to its complete abandonment ; one encounters a sort of secularist interpretation of Christian faith which is corrosive and accompanied by a deep crisis of conscience and of Christian moral practice.⁸⁰ The great values which amply inspired European culture have been separated from the Gospel, thus losing their very soul and paving the way for any number of aberrations.

“When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (*Lk* 18 :8). Will he find faith in our countries, in this Europe of ancient Christian tradition? This is an open question which clearly reveals the depth and the drama of one of the most serious challenges which our Churches are called to face. It can be said as the Synod emphasized that this challenge frequently consists not so much in baptizing new converts as in enabling those already baptized *to be converted to Christ and his Gospel*:⁸¹ in our communities we need to be seriously concerned about bringing the Gospel of hope to all those who are far from the faith or who have abandoned the practice of Christianity.

Fidelity to the one message

⁸⁰ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, I, 2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 7.

⁸¹ Cf. *Propositio* 3a.

48. Proclaiming the Gospel of hope calls for steadfast *fidelity to the Gospel itself*. The Church's *preaching*, in all its forms, *must be increasingly centred on the person of Jesus* and increasingly converge on him. Vigilant care must be taken that *Christ is presented in his fullness*: not merely as an ethical model, but above all as the Son of God, the one, necessary Saviour of all, who lives and is at work in his Church. If our hope is to be true and unshakable, “an integral, clear and renewed preaching of the Risen Christ, the resurrection and eternal life”⁸² must be a priority for pastoral activity in coming years.

Although the Gospel to be preached is the same in every time, *this preaching can be carried out in different ways*. All are called to “proclaim” Jesus and their faith in him in every situation; to “draw” others to the faith through models of personal, family, professional and community life which reflect the Gospel; “to radiate” joy, love and hope, so that many people, seeing our good works, will give glory to our Father in heaven (cf. *Mt 5 :16*) and be won over; to become “a leaven” transforming and enlivening from within every expression of culture.⁸³

By the witness of life

⁸² Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, III,1 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 8.

⁸³ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, No. 53 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 – Suppl., 12.

49. Europe calls out for *credible evangelizers*, whose lives, in communion with the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, radiate the beauty of the Gospel.⁸⁴ Such evangelizers must be *properly trained*.⁸⁵ Now more than ever a *missionary consciousness* is needed in all Christians, beginning with Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, catechists and teachers of religion : “All the baptized, since they are witnesses of Christ, should receive a training appropriate to their circumstances, not only so that their faith does not wither for lack of care in a hostile environment such as the secularist world, but also so that their witness to the Gospel will receive strength and inspiration”.⁸⁶

Our contemporaries “listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”.⁸⁷ The presence and the signs of *holiness* are thus decisive : *holiness is the essential prerequisite for an authentic evangelization* capable of reviving hope. What is needed are forceful, personal and communal testimonies of new life in Christ. It is not enough that truth and grace are offered through the proclamation of the word and the

⁸⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 4,1.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 26,1.

⁸⁶ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, III,1 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 9.

⁸⁷ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 41 : AAS 68 (1976), 31.

celebration of the sacraments ; they need to be accepted and experienced in every practical situation, in the way Christians and ecclesial communities lead their lives. This is one of the greatest challenges set before the Church in Europe at the beginning of the new millennium.

Training for an adult faith

50. “Europe's cultural and religious situation today calls for the presence of Catholics who are adult in their faith and for missionary Christian communities who testify to God's love before all mankind”.⁸⁸ The proclamation of the Gospel of hope thus implies a concern to *foster the movement* from a faith supported by social tradition, important as this is, *to a more personal and adult faith*, one marked by knowledge and conviction.

Christians are therefore “called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements ; of having an real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics ; of demonstrating that the fellowship between Catholics and other Christians is more powerful than any ethnic bond ; of joyfully passing on the faith to new generations ; and of building a Christian culture ready to evangelize the larger culture in which we live”.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Propositio* 8,1.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 8,2.

51. Along with ensuring that the ministry of the word, the celebration of the liturgy and the exercise of charity are directed to building up and sustaining a mature and personal faith, Christian communities need to work at *proposing a catechesis* adapted to the varying spiritual journeys of the faithful at different ages and in different life situations, and to provide for suitable programmes for spiritual accompaniment and for the rediscovery of one's own Baptism.⁹⁰ Naturally a fundamental point of reference in this commitment will be the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Given its undeniable priority in pastoral activity, there is a particular need to *cultivate* and, if need be, reinstitute *the ministry of catechesis* as a means of education and faith development for each individual, so that the seed planted by the Holy Spirit and passed on by Baptism can grow and reach maturity. In constant reference to the word of God, preserved in sacred Scripture, proclaimed in the liturgy and interpreted by the Church's Tradition, an organic and systematic catechesis constitutes beyond the shadow of a doubt an essential and primary means of forming Christians in an adult faith.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Cf. *Propositiones* 8, 1a-b ; 6.

⁹¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), 21 : AAS 71 (1979), 1294-1295.

52. In this same context, *the important task of theology* must also be emphasized. There is an intrinsic and inseparable link between evangelization and theological reflection, since theology, as a science possessed of a proper status and methodology, draws its life from the Church's faith and stands at the service of her mission.⁹² Theology is born of faith and is called to interpret faith, preserving its unbreakable link to the Christian community in all its different forms ; as a service to the spiritual growth of all the faithful,⁹³ it introduces them to a deeper understanding of the message of Christ.

In carrying out her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of hope, the Church in Europe expresses esteem and gratitude for *the vocation of theologians*, she values them and supports their work.⁹⁴ With respect and affection I encourage theologians to persevere in the service which they render, to combine their scholarly research with prayer, to engage in attentive dialogue with contemporary culture, to adhere faithfully to the Magisterium and to cooperate with it in a spirit of communion in truth and charity, immersed in the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and helping to nurture it.

⁹² Cf. *Propositio* 24.

⁹³ Cf. *Propositio* 8,1c.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 24.

Communion between the Particular Churches

53. The power of the proclamation of the Gospel of hope will be all the more effective if it is linked to the witness of a profound unity and communion in the Church. The individual Particular Churches cannot face alone the challenge before them. There is need for genuine *cooperation between all the Particular Churches of the Continent as an expression of their essential communion* ; a cooperation which is also called for by the new reality of Europe.⁹⁵ Here mention must be made of the contribution offered by continental ecclesial bodies, beginning with the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences*. The Council is an effective means for exploring together appropriate ways of evangelizing Europe.⁹⁶ Through an “exchange of gifts” between the various Particular Churches, the experiences and the reflections of Western and Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe are shared and common pastoral approaches emerge. The Council is becoming an increasingly significant expression of the collegial sentiment linking the Bishops of the Continent, aimed at proclaiming together,

⁹⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 22.

⁹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Presidents of the European Episcopal Conferences* (16 April 1993), 1 : AAS 86 (1994), 227.

boldly and faithfully, the name of Jesus Christ, the sole source of hope for everyone in Europe.

Together with all Christians

54. The duty of fraternal and committed *ecumenical cooperation* also emerges as an irrevocable imperative.

The future of evangelization is closely linked to the witness of unity given by all Christ's followers : "All Christians are called to carry out this mission in accordance with their vocation. The task of evangelization involves moving towards one another and moving forward together as Christians, and it must begin from within ; evangelization and unity, evangelization and ecumenism are indissolubly linked".⁹⁷ Therefore I once again make my own the words written by Paul VI to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I : "May the Holy Spirit guide us along the way of reconciliation, so that the unity of our Churches may become an ever more radiant sign of hope and consolation for all mankind".⁹⁸

In dialogue with other religions

55. As is the case with the overall commitment to the "new evangelization", so too proclaiming the Gospel of hope calls for the

⁹⁷ John Paul II, *Address during the Ecumenical Liturgy of the Word in Paderborn Cathedral* (22 June 1996), 5 : *Insegnamenti* XIX/1 (1996), 1571.

⁹⁸ Paul VI, Letter of 13 January 1970 : *Tomos Agapis*, Rome-Istanbul, 1971, 610-611 ; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 99 : AAS 87 (1995), 980.

establishment of a profound and perceptive *interreligious dialogue*, particularly with Judaism and with Islam. “Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes* ; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions”.⁹⁹ Engagement in this dialogue must avoid yielding to a “widespread indifferentism, which sad to say, is found also among Christians. It is often based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another' ”.¹⁰⁰

56. It is rather a matter of being more vividly aware of the *relationship which binds the Church to the Jewish people* and of Israel's unique role in salvation history. As was already clear from the First Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, and was reaffirmed in the latest Synod, there is need for acknowledgment of the common roots linking Christianity and the Jewish people, who are called by God to a covenant which remains irrevocable (cf. *Rom* 11 :29)¹⁰¹ and has attained definitive fullness in Christ.

⁹⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 55 : AAS 83 (1991), 302.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 36 ; loc. cit., 281.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe,, *Final Declaration* (13 December 1991), 8 : *Ench. Vat.*, 13, Nos. 653-655 ; Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 62 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 – Suppl., 13 ; *Propositio* 10.

Consequently it is necessary to encourage dialogue with Judaism, knowing that it is fundamentally important for the self-knowledge of Christians and for the transcending of divisions between the Churches, and to work for the flowering of a new springtime in mutual relations. This demands that each ecclesial community engage, to the extent that circumstances permit, in dialogue and cooperation with believers of the Jewish religion. This engagement also implies that “acknowledgment be given to any part which the children of the Church have had in the growth and spread of antisemitism in history; forgiveness must be sought for this from God, and every effort must be made to favour encounters of reconciliation and of friendship with the sons of Israel”.¹⁰² It will likewise be appropriate to mention the many Christians who, sometimes at the cost of their lives, helped and saved, especially in times of persecution, these their “elder brethren”.

57. It is also a question of growing in knowledge of other religions, in order to establish a fraternal conversation with their members who live in today's Europe. A *proper relationship with Islam* is particularly important. As has often

¹⁰² *Propositio* 10 ; cf. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *We Remember : A Reflection on the Shoah*, 16 March 1998, *Ench. Vat.*, 1, Nos. 520-550.

become evident in recent years to the Bishops of Europe, this “needs to be conducted prudently, with clear ideas about possibilities and limits, and with confidence in God's saving plan for all his children”.¹⁰³ It is also necessary to take into account the notable gap between European culture, with its profound Christian roots, and Muslim thought.¹⁰⁴

In this regard, Christians living in daily contact with Muslims should be properly trained in an objective knowledge of Islam and enabled to draw comparisons with their own faith. Such training should be provided particularly to seminarians, priests and all pastoral workers. It is on the other hand understandable that the Church, even as she asks the European institutions to ensure the promotion of religious freedom in Europe, should feel the need to insist that reciprocity in guaranteeing religious freedom also be observed in countries of different religious traditions, where Christians are a minority.¹⁰⁵

In this context, “one can understand the astonishment and the feeling of frustration of Christians who welcome, for example in Europe, believers of other religions, giving them the

¹⁰³ Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Declaration* (13 December 1991), 9 ; *Ench. Vat.*, 13, No. 656.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 11.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

possibility of exercising their worship, and who see themselves forbidden all exercise of Christian worship”¹⁰⁶ in countries where those believers are in the majority and have made their own religion the only one admitted and promoted. The human person has a right to religious freedom, and all people, in every part of the world, “should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power”.¹⁰⁷

III. Evangelizing the life of society

The evangelization of culture and the inculturation of the Gospel

58. The proclamation of Jesus Christ must also reach contemporary European culture. *The evangelization of culture* must show that in today's Europe too it is possible to live the Gospel fully as a path which gives meaning to existence. To this end, pastoral practice must undertake the task of shaping a Christian mentality in ordinary life : in families, in schools, in social communications, in cultural life, in the workplace and the economy, in politics, in leisure-time, in health and in sickness. What is needed is a calm critical assessment of the current cultural situation of Europe and an evaluation of the emerging trends and the more significant contemporary events

¹⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps* (12 January 1985), 3 : AAS 77 (1985), 650.

¹⁰⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

and situations in the light of the centrality of Christ and of Christian anthropology.

Today too, in recalling Christianity's contributions to culture throughout the history of Europe, there is a need to demonstrate the Gospel approach, both theoretical and practical, to reality and to man himself. Furthermore, considering the great importance of the sciences and technological achievements in European culture and society, the Church, through both her institutes of study and in her practical pastoral initiatives, is called to be constructive in her approach to scientific knowledge and its applications, pointing out the insufficiency and inadequacy of notions inspired by a scientism which recognizes only experimental knowledge as objectively valid, and presenting ethical criteria which man possesses as inscribed in his very nature.¹⁰⁸

59. An important part of any programme for the evangelization of culture is the service rendered by *Catholic schools*. There is a need to ensure the recognition of a genuine freedom of education and equal juridical standing between state schools and other schools. Catholic schools are sometimes the sole means by which the Christian tradition can be presented to those who are distant from it. I encourage the faithful involved in *the field of primary and secondary education*

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 23.

to persevere in their mission and to bring the light of Christ the Saviour to bear upon their specific educational, scientific and academic activities.¹⁰⁹ In particular, greater recognition is due to the contribution made by Christians who conduct research and teach in *universities*: in their “service to thought” they hand down to the next generation the values of an intellectual tradition enriched by two thousand years of humanistic and Christian experience. Convinced of the importance of academic institutions, I also ask the various local Churches to promote an adequate *pastoral care of the university community*, favouring whatever corresponds to present cultural needs.¹¹⁰

60. Nor should we overlook the positive contribution made by the wise use of the *cultural treasures* of the Church. These can be a special element in the rekindling of a humanism of Christian inspiration. When properly preserved and intelligently used, these living testimonies of the faith as professed down the ages can prove a useful resource for the new evangelization and for catechesis, and lead to a rediscovery of the sense of mystery.

At the same time *new artistic expressions of the faith* should be promoted through a constant

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Propositiones* 25 and 26,2.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 26,3.

dialogue with those engaged in the arts.¹¹¹ The Church in fact needs art, literature, music, painting, sculpture and architecture, because she “must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God”,¹¹² and because artistic beauty, as a sort of echo of the Spirit of God, is a symbol pointing to the mystery, an invitation to seek out the face of God made visible in Jesus of Nazareth.

Training young people in the faith

61. I encourage the Church in Europe to give greater attention to *the training of young people in the faith*. As we look to the future, we cannot but think of them : we need to make contact with the minds, the hearts and the character of the young in order to provide them with a sound human and Christian formation.

Wherever many young people are present, it is hard not to perceive the wide variety of their attitudes and approaches. We can see their desire to be together and to come out of their isolation, and their thirst, recognized in differing degrees, for the absolute ; we see in them a secret faith needing to be purified and desirous of following the Lord ; we become aware of their decision to continue the journey already begun and the need to share their faith.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Propositio* 27.

¹¹² John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (14 April 1999), 12 : AAS 91 (1999), 1168.

62. To this end, there is need for *a renewed youth ministry*, organized by age groups and attentive to the varying situations of children, adolescents and young adults. It will also be necessary to provide this ministry with a more organic structure and consistency, and to be patiently concerned with the questions raised by young people, in order to make them protagonists of the evangelization and the building of society.

In this process opportunities should be provided for encounter among young people, so as to foster a climate of mutual listening and prayer. There is no need to fear making demands upon them with regard to their spiritual growth. The way of holiness should be pointed out to them and they should be encouraged to make demanding choices in their following of Jesus, drawing their strength from an intense sacramental life. In this way they will learn to resist the enticements of a culture which often proposes values which are merely superficial or even contrary to the Gospel, and become capable of demonstrating a Christian approach to every sphere of human life, including entertainment and leisure.¹¹³

I can still see clearly *the joyful faces of so many young people*, the true hope of the Church and of the world and an eloquent sign of the Spirit who

¹¹³ Cf. *Propositio* 7b-c.

unceasingly causes new energies to arise. I have met them during my travels to various countries and during the unforgettable *World Youth Days*.¹¹⁴

Attention to the mass media

63. Given the importance of the means of social communication, the Church in Europe must necessarily *pay particular attention to the multifaceted world of the mass media*. This would include, among other things: the adequate training of Christians who work in the field of communications and of those who make use of the media, for a better understanding of the new kinds of language employed in the media. Special attention should be given to choosing properly trained persons to communicate the message through the media. It would also prove very helpful to have an exchange of information and of strategies between the Churches about different aspects and initiatives concerning this communication. Nor should the creation of local instruments of social communications be neglected, also on the parish level.

At the same time, it is a matter of becoming involved in the processes of social communications, in order to make them more respectful of the truth of information and of the dignity of the human person. In this regard, I

¹¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Address during the Prayer Vigil at Tor Vergata on the occasion of the XV World Youth Day* (19 August 2000), 6: *Insegnamenti* XXIII/2 (2000), 212.

invite Catholics to contribute to the establishment of a code of ethics for those who work in the field of social communications, letting themselves be guided by the criteria which the competent agencies of the Holy See have recently indicated,¹¹⁵ and which the Bishops in Synod have listed as follows: “respect for the dignity of the human person, for his or her rights, including the right of privacy; service to truth, to justice and to human, cultural and spiritual values; respect for diverse cultures to avoid their disappearance within the majority, protection of minority groups and of the weak; pursuit of the common good, over and above particular interests and the predominance of economic criteria alone”.¹¹⁶

The mission “ad gentes”

64. A proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel limited to the European context alone would betray symptoms of a disturbing lack of hope. The work of evangelization is animated by true Christian hope when it is open to universal horizons, which lead us to offer freely to all what we ourselves have received as gift. In this way the *mission ad gentes* becomes an *expression of a Church shaped by the Gospel of hope*, which is continually renewed and rejuvenated. Down the centuries

¹¹⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Social Communications*, Vatican City, 4 June 2000.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 12.

this has been part of the self-awareness of the Church in Europe: countless hosts of missionaries, going forth to meet other races and other civilizations, have proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the peoples of the whole world.

The same missionary ardour must animate the Church in Europe today. The decrease in the numbers of priests and of consecrated men and women in some countries must not prevent any Particular Church from making its own the needs of the universal Church. Every Church will find a way to prepare its faithful for the mission *ad gentes*, and thus respond with generosity to the appeal of many peoples and nations which desire to know the Gospel. The Churches of other continents, particularly Asia and Africa, still look to the Churches in Europe and expect them to continue to carry out their missionary vocation. Christians in Europe cannot be unfaithful to their own history.¹¹⁷

The Gospel: a book for the Europe of today and tomorrow

65. As I stepped through the Holy Door at the beginning of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I held high the Book of the Gospels, showing it to the Church and to the world. This same ritual action, carried out by all the Bishops in the different cathedrals of the world, points to

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 12.

the task awaiting the Church of our Continent now and for ever.

Church in Europe, enter the new millennium with the Book of the Gospels! May every member of the faithful hear the Council's plea "to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' (*Phil 3 :8*) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' ".¹¹⁸ May the Holy Bible continue to be a treasure for the Church and for every Christian : in the careful study of God's word we will daily find nourishment and strength to carry out our mission.

Let us take up this book! Let us receive it from the Lord who continually offers it to us through his Church (cf. Rev 10 :8). Let us devour it (cf. Rev 10 :9), so that it can become our very life. Let us savour it deeply : it will make demands of us, but it will give us joy because it is sweet as honey (cf. Rev 10 :9-10). Filled with hope, we will be able to share it with every man and woman whom we encounter on our way.

CHAPTER FOUR. CELEBRATING THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

"To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!" (Rev 5 :13)

¹¹⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 25.

A community of prayer

66. *The Gospel of hope*, as a proclamation of the truth which sets us free (cf. *Jn* 8 :32) *is meant to be celebrated*. Before the Lamb of the Book of Revelation there begins a solemn liturgy of praise and adoration: "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!" (*Rev* 5 :13). This vision, which reveals both God and the meaning of all history, takes place "on the Lord's day" (*Rev* 1 :10), the day of the resurrection, as re-lived by the Sunday assembly.

The Church which receives this revelation *is a community of prayer*. In her prayer she *listens to* her Lord and hears what the Spirit is saying to her. She worships, gives praise, offers thanks, and ends by imploring the coming of the Lord: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (*Rev* 22 :16-20). She thus declares that salvation comes from him alone.

Church of God dwelling in Europe, you too are called to be a community which prays, celebrating your Lord in the Sacraments, in the liturgy and in your whole life. In prayer you will discover the Lord's life-giving presence. By making him the foundation of all your activity, you will thus be able to invite Europeans to an encounter with him, our true hope, the One who alone knows how to satisfy fully the yearning for God hidden in the different forms of religious quest now reappearing in contemporary Europe.

The religious sense in today's Europe

67. Despite the dechristianization of vast areas of the European Continent, there are *signs* which suggest an image *of a Church which, in believing, proclaims, celebrates and serves her Lord.* Indeed examples are not lacking of authentic Christians who experience contemplative silence, faithfully take part in spiritual activities, live the Gospel in their daily lives and bear witness to it in the different settings in which they are involved. Moreover, we can discern examples of a “popular holiness” which indicate that in contemporary Europe too it is not impossible to live the Gospel individually and in an authentic community experience.

68. Together with the many examples of genuine faith, there also exists in Europe a *vague and at times deviant religiosity.* Its signs are often generic and superficial, or even contradictory, in the very persons who manifest them. There are evident signs of a flight to spiritualism, of religious and esoteric syncretism, of a frantic search for extraordinary events, even to the point of making aberrant decisions, such as joining dangerous sects or engaging in pseudoreligious experiences.

The *widespread desire for spiritual nourishment* needs to be accepted with understanding and purified. To the person who becomes aware, even

if in a confused way, of not being able to live by bread alone, the Church must be able to give convincing witness to the words which Jesus spoke to the tempter: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4 :4).

A Church which celebrates

69. In the context of today's society, often closed to transcendence, oppressed by consumeristic behaviour, easily falling prey to old and new forms of idolatry yet at the same time thirsting for something which goes beyond the immediate, *the task that awaits the Church in Europe* is both demanding and exciting. It consists in rediscovering the sense of "mystery"; in renewing liturgical celebrations so that they can be more eloquent signs of the presence of Christ the Lord; in ensuring greater silence in prayer and in contemplation; in returning to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance, as wellsprings of freedom and new hope.

For this reason, I urgently invite you, *the Church living in Europe: be a Church that prays, praises God, recognising his absolute primacy, magnifying him with joyful faith. Rediscover the sense of mystery: live it with humble gratitude; testify to it with conviction and contagious joy. Celebrate the salvation which comes from Christ: welcome it as a gift which makes of you its*

sacrament ; make your life a true spiritual worship pleasing to God (cf. *Rom* 12 :1).

The sense of mystery

70. Certain signs point to a weakening in the sense of mystery in the very liturgical celebrations which should be fostering that sense. It is, therefore, *urgent that the authentic sense of the liturgy be revived in the Church*. The liturgy, as the Synod Fathers noted,¹¹⁹ is a means of sanctification ; it is a celebration of the Church's faith, and a means of transmitting the faith. Together with Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, it is a living source of authentic and sound spirituality. As the tradition of the venerable Eastern Churches also clearly emphasizes, it is through the liturgy that the faithful enter into communion with the Most Holy Trinity and experience their sharing in the divine nature as a gift of grace. In this way the liturgy becomes a foretaste of final blessedness and a sharing in the glory of heaven.

71. Liturgical celebrations need once more to put Jesus at the centre, so that we can be enlightened and guided by him. Here we can find one of the most forceful responses which our communities are called to make in the face of any kind of vague or inconsistent religiosity. The purpose of the liturgy of the Church is not to placate people's desires or fears, but to hear and

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 14.

receive the living Jesus, who honours and praises the Father, in order that we may praise and honour the Father with him. The Church's celebrations proclaim that our hope comes to us from God through Jesus our Lord.

This involves *experiencing the liturgy as a work of the Trinity*. It is the Father who acts for us in the mysteries being celebrated ; it is he who speaks to us, forgives us, listens to us and gives us his Spirit ; it is to him that we turn, it is he whom we hear, praise and invoke. It is Jesus who effects our sanctification by making us sharers in his mystery. It is the Holy Spirit who by the working of his grace makes us the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Liturgy must be lived as *proclamation and anticipation of our future glory*, the ultimate goal of our hope. As the Council teaches, “in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrims, until Christ our life will appear and we too will appear with him in glory”.¹²⁰

Liturgical formation

72. Although in the period following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council real progress has been made towards experiencing the authentic meaning of the liturgy, much remains to be done. Continual renewal and constant training

¹²⁰ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8.

are needed for everyone: the ordained, consecrated persons and the laity.

True *renewal*, far from depending on arbitrary actions, consists of constantly developing an awareness of the sense of mystery, in order to create liturgical moments of communion with the great and holy mystery of the Trinity. By celebrating the sacred actions as a relationship with God and an acceptance of his gifts, the expression of an authentic spiritual life, the Church in Europe will truly be able to nourish her hope and offer that hope to those who have lost it.

73. To this end a great effort of *education* is needed. Aimed at fostering an understanding of the true meaning of the Church's liturgical celebrations, it requires, in addition to an adequate instruction in the rites, an authentic spirituality and formation in experiencing those celebrations fully.¹²¹ Consequently an authentically “liturgical mystagogy” needs to be better promoted, with the *active participation of all the faithful* – each according to his or her proper role – in the sacred mysteries, and especially the Eucharist.

¹²¹ Cf. *Propositio* 14; Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, III, 2; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 9.

II. Celebrating the Sacraments

74. A prominent place need to be given to the *celebration of the sacraments*, as actions of Christ and of the Church ordered to the worship of God, to the sanctification of people and to the building up of the ecclesial community. In the knowledge that in them Christ himself is acting through the Holy Spirit, the sacraments should be celebrated with the greatest care and under appropriate conditions. The Particular Churches on the continent will have to make efforts to strengthen their pastoral practice with regard to the sacraments so that their deepest reality is understood. The Synod Fathers have stressed the need for this in order to respond to two dangers : on the one hand, certain sectors of the Church seem to have lost sight of the genuine meaning of the sacraments and might trivialize the mysteries being celebrated ; while on the other hand, many of the baptized, following customs and traditional practices, continue to have recourse to the Sacraments at significant moments of their life, yet do not live in accordance with the Church's teaching.¹²²

The Eucharist

75. The *Eucharist*, the greatest gift of Christ to the Church, makes present in mystery the sacrifice of Christ offered for our salvation : “in

¹²² Cf. *Propositio* 15,2a.

the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch".¹²³ The pilgrim Church draws sustenance from the Eucharist, "the source and summit of the Christian life",¹²⁴ and finds there the source of all her hope. The Eucharist in fact "spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us".¹²⁵

We are all invited to *profess faith in the Eucharist*, "the pledge of future glory", in the certainty that the communion with Christ now experienced by pilgrims in their mortal lives is a foretaste of their ultimate encounter with him on that day when "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3 :2). The Eucharist is a "taste of eternity within time", it is God's presence and our communion with that presence ; as the memorial of Christ's Passover, it is by its very nature a bearer of grace within human history. It opens us to the future of God ; as communion with Christ, with his body and blood, it is a sharing in God's own eternal life.¹²⁶

¹²³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

¹²⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

¹²⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 20 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 April 2003, 3.

¹²⁶ John Paul II, *Address at the General Audience* (25 October 2000), 2 : *Insegnamenti XXIII/2* (2000), 697.

Reconciliation

76. Along with the Eucharist, the Sacrament of *Reconciliation* must also exercise a *fundamental role in the recovery of hope* : “a personal experience of the forgiveness of God for each one of us is, in fact, the essential foundation of every hope for our future”.¹²⁷ One of the roots of the hopelessness that assails many people today is found in their inability to see themselves as sinners and to allow themselves to be forgiven, an inability often resulting from the isolation of those who, by living as if God did not exist, have no one from whom they can seek forgiveness. Those who, on the other hand, acknowledge that they are sinners, and entrust themselves to the mercy of the Heavenly Father, experience the joy of an authentic liberation and can continue life without being trapped in their own misery.¹²⁸ In this way they receive the grace of a new beginning, and again find reasons for hope.

For this reason the Sacrament of Reconciliation needs to be revitalized in the Church in Europe. It must be reaffirmed, however, that the form of the sacrament is the personal confession of sins followed by individual absolution. This encounter between the penitent and the priest should be encouraged in any of the

¹²⁷ *Propositio* 16.

¹²⁸ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, III, 2 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 9.

forms provided for *in the rite of the sacrament*. Faced with the widespread loss of the sense of sin and the growth of a mentality marked by relativism and subjectivism in morality, every ecclesial community needs to provide for the serious formation of consciences.¹²⁹ The Synod Fathers have insisted on the recognition of the reality of personal sin and the necessity of personal forgiveness by God through the ministry of the priest. Collective absolutions are not an alternative way of administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation.¹³⁰

77. I appeal to *priests* and I encourage them to give generously of their time in hearing confessions and to be an example to others by their own regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance. I urge them to keep current in the field of moral theology, in order to approach knowledgeably the issues which have lately arisen in personal and social morality. Furthermore, they should be particularly concerned for the concrete living situation of the faithful, and capable of patiently guiding them to a recognition of the requirements of Christian moral law, so as to help them experience the sacrament as a joyous

¹²⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 16.

¹³⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002), 4 : AAS 94 (2002), 456-457.

encounter with the mercy of the Heavenly Father.¹³¹

Prayer and life

78. Together with the celebration of the Eucharist, there is also a need to promote other forms of *community prayer*¹³² and to help people to rediscover the bond linking the latter and liturgical prayer. In particular, in fidelity to the tradition of the Latin Church, different forms of *Eucharistic worship outside of Mass* should be promoted: private adoration, Eucharistic exposition and processions, which should be seen as an expression of faith in the continuing real presence of the Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar.¹³³ In both personal and communal celebrations of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, which the Second Vatican Council recommended as also of great value for the lay faithful,¹³⁴ efforts should be made to show their relationship with the Eucharistic mystery. Families should be encouraged to make time to pray together, and thus to interpret the whole of marriage and family life in the light of the Gospel. In this way, starting in the family and in hearing the word of God, a

¹³¹ Cf. *Propositio* 16 ; John Paul II II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday* 2002 (17 March 2002), 4 : AAS 94 (2002), 435- 436.

¹³² Cf. *Propositio* 14c.

¹³³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 100.

domestic liturgy will gradually emerge, which will then mark every event in the life of the family.¹³⁵

Every form of community prayer presupposes individual prayer. Between the individual and God there arises that true converse which finds expression in praise, thanksgiving and petition addressed to the Father through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Personal prayer, which is as it were the very breath of the Christian, should never be neglected. There is also a need to help the faithful to rediscover the link between this personal prayer and liturgical prayer.

79. Special consideration also needs to be given to *popular piety*.¹³⁶ Widely diffused in different areas of Europe through confraternities, pilgrimages and processions to numerous shrines, it enriches the unfolding of the liturgical year and inspires traditions and customs in families and in society. All these forms of popular piety should be carefully evaluated through a pastoral effort of promotion and renewal aimed at helping them to accent those elements which authentically express the wisdom of the People of God. An example of such devotions is surely the Holy Rosary. In this Year dedicated to the Rosary, I once more heartily recommend its recitation, for “the Rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the

¹³⁵ Cf. *Propositiones* 14c and 20.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 20.

very heart of Christian life ; it offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the new evangelization”.¹³⁷

With regard to popular piety, constant vigilance is needed in order to prevent ambiguities in certain of its manifestations, to preserve them from secularizing influences, crass commercialization or even the risk of superstition, and to keep them within sound and authentic forms. This calls for a work of education aimed at explaining how popular piety must always find expression in a way consonant with the Church's liturgy and in relation to the sacraments.

80. It must not be forgotten that the “*spiritual worship holy and acceptable to God*” (cf. *Rom* 12 :1) takes place above all in *daily life*, lived in charity through the free and generous gift of self, even at times of apparent powerlessness. In this way life comes to be inspired by indestructible hope, for it is entrusted to the certainty of God's power and the victory of Christ alone. It becomes a life filled with the consolations of God, with which we, in turn, are called to bring comfort to those whom we encounter along the way (cf. *2 Cor* 1 :4).

The Lord's Day

¹³⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 3 : AAS 95 (2003), 7.

81. *The Lord's day* is a highly evocative and defining moment in the celebration of the Gospel of hope.

Nowadays it is more and more difficult for Christians to be able fully to experience Sunday as the day of encounter with the Lord. Not infrequently Sunday is reduced to a “weekend”, a simple time of recreation. Thus there is need for a structured pastoral programme with educational, spiritual and social components which can help people to experience the true meaning of Sunday.

82. Consequently I renew my encouragement to “*recover the deepest meaning of the day of the Lord.*”¹³⁸ Sunday should be sanctified by sharing in the Eucharist and by rest enriched with Christian joy and fellowship. It needs to be celebrated as the heart of all worship, an unceasing prefigurement of unending life, which reinvigorates hope and encourages us on our journey. There should be no fear, then, of *defending the Lord's day against every attack and making every effort to ensure that in the organization of labour it is safeguarded*, so that it can be a day meant for man, to the benefit of all society. Indeed, were Sunday deprived of its original meaning and it were no longer possible to make suitable time for prayer, rest, fellowship and joy, the result could very well be that “people stay locked within a horizon so limited that they can no longer see 'the heavens'”. Hence, though ready

¹³⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 14.

to celebrate, they are really incapable of doing so”.¹³⁹ And without the dimension of celebration, hope would have no home in which to dwell.

CHAPTER FIVE. SERVING THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance” (Rev 2 :19)

The way of love

83. The word which the Spirit speaks to the Churches contains a *judgment about their life*. It concerns facts and forms of conduct. “*I know your works*” is the introduction which, like a refrain with minor variations, appears in the letters written to the seven Churches. If those works prove positive, it is because they are the result of effort, constancy, endurance in trial and tribulation, poverty, fidelity in time of persecution, charity, faith and service. The letters can thus be read as the description of a Church which, even more than proclaiming and celebrating the salvation which comes to her from the Lord, concretely “lives” it.

In order to serve the Gospel of hope, *the Church in Europe is also called to follow the path of love*. This path takes the form of a charity which evangelizes, a broad gamut of commitments in the service of others, and a decision for a

¹³⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998), 4 : AAS 90 (1998), 716.

generosity which is persevering and knows no limits.

I. The service of charity

In communion and solidarity

84. For every person, charity received and given is the *primordial experience which gives rise to hope*. “Man cannot live without hope. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own. If he does not participate intimately in it”.¹⁴⁰

The challenge for the Church in Europe today consists, therefore, in helping contemporary man to experience the love of God the Father and of Christ in the Holy Spirit, through the *witness of charity, which possesses an intrinsic power of evangelization*.

In the end this is the real meaning of the “Gospel”, the good news meant for every human being : God first loved us (cf. *1 Jn* 4 : 10, 19) and Jesus has loved us to the end (cf. *Jn* 13 :1). Thanks to the gift of the Spirit, God's love is offered to believers, enabling them to become sharers in his own capacity to love : it becomes a powerful force in the heart of every disciple and in all the Church (cf. *2 Cor* 5 :14). Precisely

¹⁴⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10 : AAS 71 (1979), 274.

because it is a gift of God, charity becomes a *commandment* for everyone (cf. *Jn* 13 : 34).

To live in charity thus becomes *good news* addressed to every person, and makes visible the love of God who abandons no one. In the last analysis, it means giving those who have lost their way real reasons for continuing to hope.

85. It is the vocation of the Church, as a “credible sign – even if imperfect – of an existential and experiential love, to lead men and women to an encounter with the love of God and Christ, who comes in search of them”.¹⁴¹ The Church bears witness that she is the “sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among men”¹⁴² when individuals, families and communities live intensely the Gospel of charity. In a word, our *ecclesial communities* are called to be true *training-grounds for communion*.

By its very nature the witness of charity must extend beyond the confines of ecclesial communities and reach out to every person, so that *love for everyone* can become a stimulus to authentic solidarity in every part of society. When the Church is at the service of love, she also facilitates the growth of a “culture of solidarity”

¹⁴¹ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 72 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999, Suppl., 15.

¹⁴² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

and thus helps to restore life to the universal values of human coexistence.

In this context we need to *rediscover the authentic meaning of Christian volunteerism*. Born of and continually nourished by faith, Christian volunteer work should combine professional skills and genuine love, impelling those engaged in it “to lift their feelings of good will towards others to the heights of Christ’s charity ; to renew every day, amid hard work and weariness, their awareness of the dignity of every person ; to search out people’s needs and, where necessary, to set out on new paths where needs are greater but care and support weaker”.¹⁴³

II. Serving men and women in society

Giving new hope to the poor

86. The whole Church is called to *give new hope to the poor*. In the Church, to welcome and serve the poor means to welcome and serve Christ (cf. *Mt 25 :40*). *Preferential love for the poor* is a necessary dimension of Christian existence and service to the Gospel. To love the poor, and to testify that they are especially loved by God, means acknowledging that persons have value in themselves, apart from their economic, cultural, and social status, and helping them to make the most of their potential.

¹⁴³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 90 : AAS 87 (1995), 503.

87. There is a need, then, *to confront the challenge of unemployment*, which in many nations of Europe represents a grave blight on society. To this can be added the problems connected with the increase in migration. The Church is called to remember that labour constitutes a good for which society as a whole must feel responsible.

While restating the ethical criteria which must guide the marketplace and the economy in scrupulous respect for the centrality of the human person, the Church will not fail to engage in dialogue with persons involved in political life, unions and business.¹⁴⁴ This dialogue should aim at building a Europe seen as a community of peoples and individuals, a community joined together in hope, not exclusively subject to the law of the marketplace but resolutely determined to safeguard the dignity of the human person also in social and economic relations.

88. Due importance must also be given to *the pastoral care of the sick*. Since sickness is a situation which raises fundamental questions about the meaning of life, “in a prosperous and efficient society, in a culture characterized by idolatry of the body, dismissal of suffering and pain and by the myth of perennial youth”,¹⁴⁵ the care of the sick is to be considered a priority. To this end, an appropriate pastoral presence needs to be ensured

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 33.

¹⁴⁵ *Propositio* 35.

in the different places where the suffering are found, as for example through the committed work of hospital chaplains, members of volunteer associations and Church-associated health care institutions, while on the other hand support should be provided for the families of the sick. There is also a need for a suitable pastoral presence among medical and paramedical personnel, in order to support them in their demanding vocation in the service of the sick. In their work, health care personnel daily render a noble service to life. They too are called to offer patients that special spiritual support which builds on the warmth of an authentic human contact.

89. Finally, it cannot be forgotten that at times *improper use is made of the goods of the earth*. By failing in his mission of cultivating and caring for the land with wisdom and love (cf. *Gen 2:15*), man has in fact devastated woodlands and plains in many regions, polluted bodies of water, made the air unbreathable, upset hydro-geological and atmospheric systems and caused the desertification of vast areas.

In this case too, rendering service to the Gospel of hope means committing ourselves in new ways to *a proper use of the goods of the earth*,¹⁴⁶ encouraging that sense of concern which, in addition to safeguarding natural habitats, defends the quality of the life of individuals and thus

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Propositio 36*.

prepares for future generations an environment more in harmony with the Creator's plan.

The truth about marriage and the family

90. The Church in Europe at every level must faithfully proclaim anew *the truth about marriage and the family*.¹⁴⁷ She sees this as burning need, for she knows that this task is integral to the mission of evangelization entrusted to her by her Bridegroom and Lord, and imposes itself today with unusual force. Many cultural, social and political factors are in fact conspiring to create an increasingly evident crisis of the family. In varying ways they jeopardize the truth and dignity of the human person, and call into question, often misrepresenting it, the notion of the family itself. The value of marital indissolubility is increasingly denied; demands are made for the legal recognition of *de facto* relationships as if they were comparable to legitimate marriages; and attempts are made to accept a definition of the couple in which difference of sex is not considered essential.

In this context the Church is called to *proclaim with renewed vigour what the Gospel teaches about marriage and the family*, in order to grasp their meaning and value in God's saving plan. In particular it is necessary to reaffirm that these institutions are realities grounded in the will of God. There is a need to rediscover the truth

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 31.

about the family as an intimate communion of life and love¹⁴⁸ open to the procreation of new persons, as well as its dignity as a “domestic Church” and its share in the mission of the Church and in the life of society.

91. According to the Synod Fathers, recognition is due to the many families who, in the simplicity of a daily existence lived in love, are visible witnesses of the presence of Jesus who accompanies and sustains them with the gift of his Spirit. In order to support their journey, it will be necessary to enrich the theology and spirituality of marriage and family life ; to proclaim with firmness and integrity, and to demonstrate by convincing examples, the truth and the beauty of the family founded upon marriage and understood as a stable and fruitful union of a man and a woman ; and to promote in every ecclesial community an adequate and integrated programme of pastoral care for the family. At the same time the Church will need, with maternal concern, to provide assistance to those who are in difficult situations, such as single mothers, the separated, the divorced, and abandoned children. In all events it will be necessary to encourage, assist and support families, both individually and in associations, who seek to play their proper role in the Church

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

and in society, and to work for the promotion of genuine and adequate family policies on the part of individual States and the European Union itself.¹⁴⁹

92. With respect to *young people and engaged couples*, particular attention must be given to providing *education in love* through special programmes of preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, as a means of helping them to live chastely as they prepare for this moment. In her educational activity the Church must also demonstrate a concern to provide guidance and support to newly-married couples after the celebration of their wedding.

93. Finally, the Church is also called to be present with maternal affection to those marital situations which could easily appear hopeless. In particular, “with regard to the large number of broken families, the Church feels called not to express a harsh, detached judgement, but rather to *let the light of God's word*, accompanied by the witness of his mercy, *shine deep within so many tragic human situations*. This is the spirit in which the pastoral care of families must also address the situation of *the faithful who are divorced and civilly remarried*. They are not excluded from the community ; rather, they are encouraged to share in its life, while undertaking a journey of growth in the spirit of the Gospel's demands. The

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 31.

Church, while not concealing from them the truth about the objective moral disorder of their situation and its consequences for sacramental practice, wishes to show to them all her maternal closeness”.¹⁵⁰

94. If serving the Gospel of hope calls for giving adequate attention and priority to the family, it is equally the case that *families themselves have an irreplaceable responsibility* for the Gospel of hope. With confidence and affection, then, I renew my invitation to all Christian families living on this continent of Europe : “Families, become what you are!” You are *a living sign of God's love* : indeed, you have a “mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his Bride”.¹⁵¹

You are “*a sanctuary of life* : the place in which life – the gift of God can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth”.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Address to the Third World Meeting with Families on the Occasion of their Jubilee*, (14 October 2000), 6 : *Insegnamenti* XXIII/2 (2000), 603.

¹⁵¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 17 : AAS 74 (1982), 99-100.

¹⁵² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39 : AAS 83 (1991), 842.

You are the *foundation* of society, as the primary locus for the “humanization” of individuals and society,¹⁵³ a model for the establishment of social relations lived out in love and in solidarity.

Be credible witnesses to the Gospel of hope! For you yourselves are “*gaudium et spes*”.¹⁵⁴

At the service of the Gospel of life

95. The growing age and declining population in various European countries cannot fail to be a cause of concern ; the *falling birthrate* is in fact symptomatic of a troubled relationship with our own future. It is a clear indication of a lack of hope and a sign of the “culture of death” present in contemporary society.¹⁵⁵

Together with the decline in the birthrate, mention should be made of other factors that have obscured the sense of the value of life, and led to a kind of conspiracy against life. Sadly, among these factors must be numbered, first of all, the spread of *abortion*, also through the use of chemical-pharmaceutical preparations which make abortion possible without the involvement of a physician and in a way detached from any form of social responsibility. This is favoured by the fact that the legal systems of many European

¹⁵³ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 40 : AAS 81 (1989), 469.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the First World Meeting with Families* (8 October 1994), 7 : AAS 87 (1995), 587.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 32.

countries contain legislation permitting an act which remains an “abominable crime”¹⁵⁶ and which always constitutes a grave moral disorder. Mention must also be made of attacks involving “forms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos” or the incorrect use of prenatal diagnostic techniques, which are placed at the service not of early detection and possible treatment but of “a eugenic intention which accepts selective abortion”.¹⁵⁷

We must also mention the presence of a tendency in certain parts of Europe to consider it permissible to make a conscious decision to end one's own life or that of another human being : the result is the spread of covert, or even openly practised *euthanasia*, the legalization of which is often sought and, tragically, at times achieved.

96. Given this state of affairs, it is necessary to *serve the Gospel of life* through “a *general mobilization of consciences* and a *united ethical effort* to activate a *great campaign in support of life*. *All together, we must build a new culture of life*”.¹⁵⁸ This is the great challenge which we must accept as our responsibility, in the certainty that “the future of

¹⁵⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.

¹⁵⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 63 : AAS 87 (1995), 473.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95 : loc. cit., 509.

European civilization greatly depends on the resolute defence and promotion of the life-giving values which are the core of its cultural patrimony".¹⁵⁹ This means restoring to Europe her true dignity as a place where every person is affirmed in his or her incomparable dignity.

I gladly make my own these words of the Synod Fathers: "The Synod of European Bishops encourages Christian communities to become evangelizers of life. It encourages Christian couples and families to support one another in fidelity to their mission as cooperators with God in the generation and education of new creatures. It values every generous effort to react to a selfishness in the area of transmitting life encouraged by false models of security and happiness. It asks the States of the European Union to enact far-sighted policies aimed at fostering concrete conditions of housing, employment and social services suitable for favouring the establishment of families and enabling them to respond to the call to parenthood, and also to assure today's Europe of its most precious resource: the Europeans of tomorrow".¹⁶⁰

Building a city worthy of man

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Address to the new Ambassador of Norway to the Holy See* (25 March 1995): *Insegnamenti* XVIII/1 (1995), 857.

¹⁶⁰ *Propositio* 32.

97. A charity which bears fruit in works makes us committed to hastening the coming of the future Kingdom. It therefore cooperates in promoting the authentic values which are the basis of a civilization worthy of man. As the Second Vatican Council recalled : “Christians, on pilgrimage towards the heavenly city, should seek and savour the things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, but rather increases, the weight of their obligation to work with all people in building a more human world”.¹⁶¹ Our expectation of new heavens and a new earth, far from withdrawing us from history, intensifies our concern for the present life, which even now contains that newness which is the seed and the sign of the world yet to come.

Inspired by these certainties of faith, *let us strive to build a city worthy of man*. Though it is impossible to create within history a perfect social order, we know that God blesses every sincere effort to build a better world, and that every seed of justice and love planted in the present will bear fruit for eternity.

98. In building a city worthy of man, *a guiding role should be played by the Church's social teaching*. Through this teaching the Church challenges the continent of Europe about the moral quality of its civilization. This social doctrine arises from

¹⁶¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 57.

the encounter of the biblical message and human reason on the one hand, and on the other with the problems and situations involving individual and social life. By the body of principles which it sets forth, the Church's social doctrine helps lay solid foundations for a humane coexistence in justice, peace, freedom and solidarity. Because it is aimed at defending and promoting the dignity of the human person, which is the basis not only of economic and political life, but also of social justice and peace, this doctrine proves capable of upholding the supporting structures of Europe's future.¹⁶² It contains points of reference which make it possible to defend the moral structure of freedom, so as to protect European culture and society both from the totalitarian utopia of "justice without freedom" and from the utopia of "freedom without truth" which goes hand in hand with a false concept of "tolerance". Both utopias portend errors and horrors for humanity, as the recent history of Europe sadly attests.¹⁶³

99. Because of its intrinsic connection with the dignity of the human person, the Church's social doctrine is also capable of being appreciated by those who are not members of the community of believers. It is urgent, then, that

¹⁶² Cf. *Propositio* 28; Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe,, *Final Message* (13 December 1991), 10 : *Ench. Vat.* 13, Nos. 659-669.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Propositio* 23.

this doctrine be better known and studied, and that more and more Christians become familiar with it. The new Europe now being built demands this, since it requires individuals formed in these values and disposed to working for the attainment of the common good. This will require the presence of Christian lay faithful who, by their various responsibilities in civic life, the economy, culture, health care, education and politics, are able by their activities to imbue these spheres with the values of the Kingdom.¹⁶⁴

Towards a culture of acceptance

100. The challenges presently facing our service of the Gospel of hope include the growing phenomenon of *immigration*, which calls on the Church's ability to welcome each person regardless of the people or nation to which he or she belongs. This phenomenon is also prompting European society and its institutions as a whole to seek a just order and forms of coexistence capable of respecting everyone, as well as the demands of legality, within a feasible process of integration.

If we consider, among the causes which lead many to leave their own land, the state of extreme poverty, underdevelopment and insufficient freedom which unfortunately still characterizes various countries, there is a need for courageous commitment on the part of all to *bring about a more*

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 28.

just international economic order capable of promoting the authentic development of every people and country.

101. The phenomenon of migration challenges Europe's ability to provide for forms of intelligent *acceptance and hospitality*. A “universal” vision of the common good demands this : we need to broaden our gaze to embrace the needs of the entire human family. The phenomenon of globalization itself calls for openness and sharing, if it is not to be a source of exclusion and marginalization, but rather a basis for solidarity and the sharing of all in the production and exchange of goods.

Everyone must work for the growth of a *mature culture of acceptance* which, in taking into account the equal dignity of each person and need for solidarity with the less fortunate, calls for *the recognition of the fundamental rights of each immigrant*. Public authorities have the responsibility of controlling waves of migration with a view to the requirements of the common good. The acceptance of immigrants must always respect the norms of law and must therefore be combined, when necessary, with a firm *suppression of abuses*.

102. There is also a need for commitment in identifying possible forms of *genuine integration* on the part of immigrants who have been legitimately received into the social and cultural

fabric of the different European nations. This demands not yielding to indifference regarding universal human values and a concern for safeguarding the cultural patrimony proper to each nation. Peaceful coexistence and the exchange of mutual interior riches will make it possible to build a Europe capable of becoming a home for everyone, in which each person can be welcomed and none will suffer discrimination, where all people are treated responsibly and can live responsibly as members of a single great family.

103. On her part, the Church is called “to continue her activity in creating and continually improving her *services of welcome* and her *pastoral attention* for immigrants and refugees”,¹⁶⁵ in order to ensure respect for their dignity and freedom and to promote their integration.

In particular, specific *pastoral care needs to be given to the integration of Catholic immigrants*, with respect for their culture and their distinct religious traditions. To this end, contacts should be encouraged between the Churches in their native countries and those to which they have migrated, in order to study forms of assistance which could include the presence among immigrants of priests, consecrated men and women, and properly trained pastoral workers from their own countries.

¹⁶⁵ *Propositio* 34.

The service of the Gospel also requires the Church, in defending the cause of the oppressed and excluded, *to call on the political authorities of the different States and the leaders of European institutions* to grant refugee status to those who have left their country of origin because of threats to their life, to help them return to their countries, and to create conditions favouring respect for the dignity of all immigrants and the defence of their fundamental rights.¹⁶⁶

III. Let us commit ourselves to charity!

104. The appeal to exercise an active charity, which the Synod Fathers addressed to all the Christians of the European continent,¹⁶⁷ represents the happy synthesis of an authentic service of the Gospel of hope. I now propose it anew to you, the Church of Christ in Europe. The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of contemporary Europeans, especially the poor and the suffering, must also be your joys and your hopes, your sorrows and your anxieties. May nothing which is genuinely human lack an echo in your heart. Look upon Europe and upon its future with the sympathy of one who appreciates every positive element, yet do not close your eyes

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Instruction *Nemo Est* (22 August 1969), 16 : AAS 61 (1969), 621-622 ; CIC, canons 294 and 518 ; CCEO, canon 280 § 1.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 5 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 6.

to all that is inconsistent with the Gospel and denounce it forcefully.

105. Church in Europe, welcome every day with renewed freshness the gift of charity which your Lord offers to you and enables you to accept.

Learn from him the content and the measure of love. *Be the Church of the Beatitudes*, constantly conformed to Christ (cf. *Mt* 5 :1-12).

Free from all forms of hindrance and dependency, be poor yourself and a friend to the poor, welcoming every person and attentive to all forms of poverty, both old and new.

Continuously purified by the Father's goodness, see in the attitude of Christ, who always defended the truth yet still showed mercy towards sinners, the supreme norm of all your actions.

In Jesus, at whose birth peace was proclaimed (cf. *Lk* 2 :14), in him whose death broke down the walls of enmity (cf. *Eph* 2 :14) and brought true peace (cf. *Jn* 14 :27), be a builder of peace. Encourage your sons and daughters to allow their hearts to be purified of all hostility, selfishness and partisanship, and to favour at all times mutual dialogue and respect.

In Jesus, who is the justice of God, never grow weary of denouncing injustice in all its forms. Living in the world with the values of the Kingdom to come, you will be a Church of

charity and you will make your indispensable contribution to the building in Europe of a civilization ever more worthy of man.

CHAPTER SIX. THE GOSPEL OF HOPE FOR A NEW EUROPE

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven” (Rev 21 :2)

The newness of God in history

106. The Gospel of hope resounding throughout the Book of Revelation opens our hearts to the *contemplation of the newness brought about by God*: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth ; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (*Rev 21 :1*). God himself says as much, in the words explaining the vision which has just taken place : “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev 21 :5*).

The newness of God which can only be fully understood against the backdrop of the old things, made up of tears, mourning, lamentation, travail and death (cf. *Rev 21 :4*) – consists in leaving behind the state of sin and its consequences in which humanity finds itself ; it is the new heavens and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, in contrast to the old heaven and earth, an obsolete order of things and an old Jerusalem, tormented by its rivalries.

The image of the new Jerusalem coming down “out of heaven from God, prepared as a

bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev* 21 :2) is a direct reference to the mystery of the Church and is not irrelevant for building the city of man. It is an image which speaks of an *eschatological reality* which transcends human possibilities and is a gift of God which will appear in the last days. Yet it is not a utopia : it is a *reality already in our midst*. This can be seen by the present tense of the verbs which God uses : “Behold, I *make* all things new” (*Rev* 21 :5), and, as a further clarification : “It is done!” (*Rev* 21 :6). God is already at work renewing the world ; the newness of God is already found in Jesus' Pasch. It is this which brings the Church to birth, inspires her life, and renews and transforms her history.

107. This newness begins to take shape first of all *in the Christian community*, which is even now “the dwelling of God with men” (*Rev* 21 :3), in whose midst God is already at work, renewing the life of all who yield to the Spirit's breath. The Church is for the world a sign and instrument of the Kingdom which comes about first in human hearts. A reflection of this newness can also be seen *in every form of human coexistence inspired by the Gospel*. It is a newness that speaks to society at every moment of history and in every place on earth, and in particular to European society, which for so many centuries has heard the Gospel of the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus.

Europe as a promoter of universal values

108. The history of the European continent has been distinctively marked by the life-giving influence of the Gospel. “If we turn our gaze to the past centuries, we can only give thanks to the Lord that *on our continent Christianity has been a primary factor of unity among peoples and cultures* and of the integral promotion of man and his rights”.¹⁶⁸

There can be no doubt that the Christian faith belongs, in a radical and decisive way, to the foundations of European culture. Christianity in fact has shaped Europe, impressing upon it certain basic values. Modern Europe itself, which has given the democratic ideal and human rights to the world, draws its values from its Christian heritage. More than a geographical area, Europe can be described as “a *primarily cultural and historical concept*, which denotes a reality born as a continent thanks also to the unifying force of Christianity, which has been capable of integrating peoples and cultures among themselves, and which is intimately linked to the whole of European culture”.¹⁶⁹

Today's Europe however, at the very moment it is in the process of strengthening and enlarging its economic and political union, seems

¹⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Homily at the Conclusion of the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops* (23 October 1999), 5 : AAS 92 (2000), 179.

¹⁶⁹ *Propositio* 39.

to suffer from a profound crisis of values. While possessed of increased resources, it gives the impression of lacking the energy needed to sustain a common project and to give its citizens new reasons for hope.

The new face of Europe

109. In the process of transformation which it is now undergoing, *Europe is called above all to rediscover its true identity*. Even though it has developed into a highly diversified reality, it needs to build a new model of unity in diversity, as a community of reconciled nations open to the other continents and engaged in the present process of globalization.

To give new impetus to its own history, Europe must “recognize and reclaim with creative fidelity those fundamental values, acquired through a decisive contribution of Christianity, which can be summarized in the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religion”.¹⁷⁰

110. The European Union continues to expand. All peoples who share its same fundamental heritage have a vocation to take part in it, on a short-term or a long-term basis. It is to be hoped that this expansion will come about in a way that respects all people, valuing their

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

historical and cultural distinctions, their national identities and the great contributions which can come from new members. It should also take place in a way that puts into practice in an ever more fully developed manner the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.¹⁷¹ In the process of the continent's integration, it is of capital importance to remember that the union will lack substance if it is reduced to its merely geographic and economic dimensions ; rather, it must consist above all in an agreement about the values which must find expression in its law and in its life.

Promoting solidarity and peace in the world

111. Saying “Europe” must be equivalent to saying “openness”. Despite experiences and signs to the contrary, which it has not lacked, European history itself demands this : “Europe is really not a closed or isolated territory ; it has been built by expanding overseas and meeting other peoples, other cultures, other civilizations”.¹⁷² Therefore it needs to be an *open and welcoming Continent*, continuing to develop in the current process of globalization forms of cooperation which are not merely economic but social and cultural as well.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.* ; *Propositio* 28.

¹⁷² John Paul II, *Letter to Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences* (16 October 2000), 7 : *Insegnamenti*, XXIII/2 (2000), 628.

There is one need to which Europe must respond positively if it is to have a truly new face : “Europe cannot close in on itself. It cannot and must not lose interest in the rest of the world. On the contrary, it must remain fully aware of the fact that other countries, other continents, await its bold initiatives, in order to offer to poorer peoples the means for their growth and social organization, and to build a more just and fraternal world”.¹⁷³ To carry out this mission adequately will demand “*rethinking international cooperation in terms of a new culture of solidarity*. When seen as a sowing of peace, cooperation cannot be reduced to aid or assistance, especially if given with an eye to the benefits to be received in return for the resources made available. Rather, it must express a concrete and tangible commitment to solidarity which makes the poor the agents of their own development and enables the greatest number of people, in their specific economic and political circumstances, to exercise the creativity which is characteristic of the human person and on which the wealth of nations too is dependent”.¹⁷⁴

112. Europe must moreover become *an active partner in promoting and implementing a globalization “in” solidarity*. This must be accompanied, as a pre-

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Message for the 2000 Day of Peace* (8 December 1999), 17 : AAS 92 (2000), 367-368.

condition, by a kind of *globalization* “of” *solidarity* and of the related values of equity, justice and freedom, based on the firm conviction that the marketplace needs to be “appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied”.¹⁷⁵

The Europe handed down to us by history has witnessed the rise, especially in the last century, of totalitarian ideologies and extreme forms of nationalism which darkened the hopes of individuals and the peoples on the Continent and sparked conflicts both within and between nations, leading up to the immense tragedy of the two World Wars.¹⁷⁶ More recent ethnic conflicts, which have again led to bloodshed on the continent of Europe, have once more demonstrated to everyone how fragile peace is, how it requires an active commitment on the part of all, and how it can be ensured only by opening up new prospects of exchange, forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals, peoples and nations.

In this state of affairs, Europe, with all its inhabitants, needs to *work tirelessly to build peace* within its borders and throughout the world. In this regard, it must be recalled that “on the one

¹⁷⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 35 : AAS 83 (1991), 837.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 39.

hand, national differences ought to be maintained and encouraged as the foundation of European solidarity, while on the other, national identity itself can only be achieved in openness towards other peoples and through solidarity with them".¹⁷⁷

II. The Building Up of Europe

The role of European Institutions

113. In the work of creating a new face for the continent, *the role of international institutions* is in many ways decisive. Associated with and operating principally on European territory, they have left their a mark on the course of historical events without being engaged in operations of a military character. In this regard I wish to mention first of all the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which works to maintain peace and stability, also through the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and through economic and environmental cooperation.

There is also the Council of Europe, made up of those states which were signatories to the 1950 European Convention for the safeguarding of fundamental human rights and the 1961 Social Charter. Connected to them is the European Court of Human Rights. These two institutions

¹⁷⁷ Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 85 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999, Suppl., 17 ; cf. *Propositio* 39.

seek, by means of political, social, juridic and cultural cooperation, as well as by the promotion of human rights and democracy, to build a Europe of freedom and solidarity. Finally, the European Union, with its Parliament, its Council of Ministers and its Commission, proposes a model of integration which is to be perfected by the eventual adoption of a common fundamental charter. This body has the aim of achieving greater political, economic and monetary unity between the member states, both present and future. In their diversity and on the basis of the specific identity of each, the European Institutions promote the unity of the continent, and, more profoundly, are at the service of mankind.¹⁷⁸

114. Together with the Synod Fathers,¹⁷⁹ I ask these same European institutions and the individual states of Europe to recognize that *a proper ordering of society must be rooted in authentic ethical and civil values* shared as widely as possible by its citizens ; at the same time I would note that these values are the patrimony, in the first place, of the various social bodies. It is important that the institutions and the individual states recognize that these social bodies also include Churches and Ecclesial Communities and other religious

¹⁷⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Office of the Presidency of the European Parliament* (5 April 1979) : *Insegnamenti*, II/1 (1979), 796-799.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Propositio*, 37.

organizations. Even more so, in those cases where these already existed before the foundation of European nations, they cannot be reduced to merely private entities but act with a specific institutional import which merits being given serious consideration. In carrying out their functions the various national and European institutions should act in the awareness that their juridical systems will be fully respectful of democracy, if they provide for *forms of "healthy cooperation"*¹⁸⁰ with Churches and religious organizations.

In the light of what I have just emphasized, I wish once more to appeal to those drawing up the future European constitutional treaty, so that it will include a reference to the religious and in particular the Christian heritage of Europe. While fully respecting the secular nature of the institutions, I consider it desirable especially that three complementary elements should be recognized: the right of Churches and religious communities to organize themselves freely in conformity with their statutes and proper convictions; respect for the specific identity of the different religious confessions and provision for a structured dialogue between the European Union and those confessions; and respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and

¹⁸⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 76.

religious institutions by virtue of the legislation of the member states of the Union.¹⁸¹

115. The European institutions have as their declared purpose the defence of the rights of the human person. In carrying out this task they contribute to the building of the Europe of values and of law. The Synod Fathers called upon the leaders of Europe in the following words : “Raise your voices in the face of the violation of *human rights* of individuals, minorities and peoples, beginning with the right to religious freedom ; pay utmost attention to everything that concerns *human life* from the moment of its conception to natural death and to the *family* based on marriage : these are the foundations on which our common European home rests ;... respond, with justice and equity and with a great sense of solidarity, to the growing phenomenon of *migration*, and see in it a new resource for the future of Europe ; make every effort to guarantee young people a truly humane future with *work, culture, and education* in moral and spiritual values”.¹⁸²

The Church for the new Europe

116. Europe needs a *religious dimension*. If it is to be “new”, by analogy with what is said about the “new city” of the Book of Revelation (cf.

¹⁸¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps* (13 January 2003), 5 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13-14 January 2003, 6.

¹⁸² Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Message*, 6 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

21 :2), it must open itself to the workings of God. The hope of building a more just world, a world more worthy of man, cannot prescind from a realization that human effort will be of no avail unless it is accompanied by divine assistance : for “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain” (Ps 127 :1). For Europe to be built on solid foundations, there is a need to call upon authentic values grounded in the universal moral law written on the heart of every man and woman. “Not only can Christians join with all people of goodwill in working to build this great project, but they are also called to be in some way its heart, revealing the true meaning of the organization of the earthly city”.¹⁸³

One and universal, yet present in the multiplicity of the Particular Churches, the Catholic Church can offer a unique contribution to the building up of a Europe open to the world. The Catholic Church in fact provides a model of essential unity in a diversity of cultural expressions, a consciousness of membership in a universal community which is rooted in but not confined to local communities, and a sense of what unites beyond all that divides.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ John Paul II, *Letter to Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences* (16 October 2000), 4 : *Insegnamenti* XXIII/2 (2000), 626.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Declaration*, 10 : *Ench. Vat.* 13, No. 669.

117. In her relations with public authorities the Church is not calling for a return to the confessional state. She likewise deplors every type of ideological secularism or hostile separation between civil institutions and religious confessions.

For her part, *in keeping with a healthy cooperation between the ecclesial community and political society, the Catholic Church is convinced that she can make a unique contribution* to the prospect of unification by offering the European institutions, in continuity with her tradition and in fidelity to the principles of her social teaching, the engagement of believing communities committed to bringing about the humanization of society on the basis of the Gospel, lived under the sign of hope. From this standpoint, the *presence of Christians*, properly trained and competent, is needed in the various European agencies and institutions, in order to contribute – with respect for the correct dynamics of democracy and through an exchange of proposals – to the shaping of a European social order which is increasingly respectful of every man and woman, and thus in accordance with the common good.

118. The Europe which must be built up as a “union” also impels *Christians towards unity* so that they can be true witnesses of hope. In this context, the *exchange of gifts*, which in this last decade has had significant expressions, should be

continued and developed. When it takes place between communities with different histories and traditions, it leads to more durable bonds between the Churches in different countries and their reciprocal enrichment through meetings, exchanges of ideas and mutual assistance. In particular the contribution of the cultural and spiritual tradition offered by the Eastern Catholic Churches needs to be better appreciated.¹⁸⁵

An important role in the growth of this unity can be played by *continental organizations of ecclesial communion*, which need to be further encouraged.¹⁸⁶ Among these a significant place must be given to the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences*, which is called on the continental level “to provide for the promotion of an ever more intense communion among Dioceses and the national Episcopal Conferences, for the growth in ecumenical cooperation among Christians and the overcoming of obstacles which threaten the future of peace and the progress of peoples, for the strengthening of affective and effective collegiality and of hierarchical communion”.¹⁸⁷ Together with the Council, acknowledgment must also be made of the service provided by the *Commission of the Episcopates of the European*

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 22.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Address to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe* (16 April 1993), 5 : *AAS* 86 (1994), 229.

Community, which, in following the process of consolidation and enlargement of the European Union, favours the sharing of information and coordinates the pastoral initiatives of the European Churches involved.

119. The strengthening of union in Europe motivates Christians to cooperate in the process of integration and reconciliation through a theological, spiritual, ethical and social dialogue.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, “in the Europe which is proceeding towards political unity, can we accept that the Church of Christ is herself a factor of division and of discord? Would this not be one of the greatest scandals of our time?”¹⁸⁹

From the Gospel, a new enthusiasm for Europe

120. Europe needs to make a qualitative leap in *becoming conscious of its spiritual heritage*. The impetus for this can only come from hearing anew the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the responsibility of all Christians to commit themselves to satisfying this hunger and thirst for life.

Consequently “the Church feels it her duty to repeat vigourously the message of hope entrusted to her by God” and says again to Europe : “*The*

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 39d.

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Homily during the Ecumenical Celebration on the occasion of the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops* (7 December 1991), 6 : *Insegnamenti* XIV/2 (1991), 1330.

Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty Saviour!" (Zeph 3 :17). Her invitation to hope is not based on a utopian ideology ; on the contrary, it is the timeless message of salvation proclaimed by Christ (cf. *Mk* 1 :15). With the authority she has received from her Lord, the Church repeats to today's Europe : Europe of the third millennium, "let not your hands grow weak!" (Zeph 3 :16) ; do not give in to discouragement, do not resign yourself to ways of thinking and living that have no future because they are not based on the solid certainty of God's Word!"¹⁹⁰

Taking up anew this invitation to hope, I repeat to you again today : *Europe*, as you stand at the beginning of the third millennium, "Open the doors to Christ! Be yourself. Rediscover your origins. Relive your roots".¹⁹¹ Down the centuries you have received the treasure of Christian faith. It has grounded your life as a society on principles drawn from the Gospel, and traces of this are evident in the art, literature, thought and culture of your nations. But this heritage does not belong just to the past ; it is a project in the making, to be passed on to future generations, for it has indelibly marked the life of the individuals and

¹⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Homily for the Opening of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe* (1 October 1999), 3 : AAS 92 (2000), 174-175.

¹⁹¹ *Address to European Authorities and to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe* (9 November 1982), 4 : AAS 75 (1983), 330.

peoples who together have forged the continent of Europe.

121. *Do not be afraid! The Gospel is not against you, but for you.* This is confirmed by the fact that Christian inspiration is capable of transforming political, cultural and economic groupings into a form of coexistence in which all Europeans will feel at home and will form a family of nations from which other areas of the world can draw fruitful inspiration.

Be confident! In the Gospel, which is Jesus, you will find the sure and lasting hope to which you aspire. This hope is grounded in the victory of Christ over sin and death. He wishes this victory to be your own, for your salvation and your joy.

Be certain! The Gospel of hope does not disappoint! Throughout the vicissitudes of your history, yesterday and today, it is a the light which illumines and directs your way ; it is the strength which sustains you in trials ; it is the prophecy of a new world ; it is the sign of a new beginning ; it is the invitation to everyone, believers and non-believers alike, to blaze new trails leading to a “Europe of the spirit”, in order to make the continent a true “common home” filled with the joy of life.

CONCLUSION

Entrustment to Mary

“A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12 :1)

The Woman, the Dragon and the Child

122. The Church's journey through history is accompanied by “signs” which are visible to all, yet need to be interpreted. Among such signs the Book of Revelation presents the “great portent” which appeared in the sky, which speaks of a *conflict between the woman and the dragon*.

The woman, clothed with the sun, in travail and ready to give birth (cf. *Rev 12 :1-2*), can be seen as the Israel of the Prophets which gives birth to the Messiah “who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (*Rev 12 :5* ; cf. *Ps 2 :9*). But she is also the Church, the People of the New Covenant, subjected to persecution and yet protected by God. The *dragon* is “the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (*Rev 12 :9*). The *conflict* is an uneven one : the dragon seems to prevail, so great is his arrogance before the defenceless and suffering woman. Yet in reality *the triumph belongs to the son born of the woman*. In this conflict one thing is certain : the great dragon has already been defeated ; “he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him” (*Rev 12 :9*). He was defeated by Christ, God made man, through his death and resurrection, and by the martyrs “through the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (*Rev 12 :11*). And

even when the dragon continues his opposition, there is no reason for fear, since his defeat has already taken place.

123. This is the certainty which heartens the Church on her pilgrim way ; in the story of the woman and the dragon she reads her own history ever anew. The woman who gives birth to her son also brings to mind *the Virgin Mary*, especially at that moment when, transfixed by suffering at the foot of the Cross, she begets her Son anew as the victor over the prince of this world. She is then entrusted to John who in turn is entrusted to her (cf. *Jn* 19 :26-27), and thus she becomes the Mother of the Church. Thanks to the bond uniting Mary to the Church and the Church to Mary, the mystery of the woman becomes clearer : “Mary, present in the Church as the Mother of the Redeemer, takes part, as a mother, in that 'monumental struggle against the powers of darkness,' which continues throughout human history. And by her ecclesial identification as the 'woman clothed with the sun' (*Rev* 12 :1), it can be said that 'in the Most Holy Virgin the Church has already reached the perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle' ”.¹⁹²

124. The whole Church, then, *looks to Mary*. Thanks to the countless Marian shrines dotting the nations of the continent, devotion to Mary is

¹⁹² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 47 : AAS 79 (1987), 426.

very strong and widespread among the peoples of Europe.

*Church in Europe! Continue to contemplate Mary, in the knowledge that she is “maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families, and nations” and is “helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that it 'does not fall', or, if it has fallen, that it 'rises again' ”.*¹⁹³

Prayer to Mary, Mother of Hope

125. In this contemplation, inspired by genuine love, Mary appears to us as a figure of the Church which, nourished by hope, acknowledges the saving and merciful action of God, in whose light she reads her own journey and all of history. Today too Mary helps us to interpret all that happens to us in the light of Jesus her Son. As a new creation moulded by the Holy Spirit, *Mary causes the virtue of hope to grow within us.*

To her, Mother of hope and consolation, we confidently lift up our prayer: to her we entrust the future of the Church in Europe and the future of all the women and men of this continent :

Mary, Mother of hope,
accompany us on our journey!
Teach us to proclaim the living God ;
help us to bear witness to Jesus,

¹⁹³ Ibid., 52 : loc. cit., 432 ; cf. *Propositio* 40.

the one Saviour ;
make us kindly towards our neighbours,
welcoming to the needy,
concerned for justice,
impassioned builders of a more just world ;
intercede for us
as we carry out our work in history,
certain that the Father's plan will be fulfilled.

Dawn of a new world,
show yourself the Mother of hope
and *watch over us!*
Watch over the Church in Europe :
may she be transparently open to the Gospel ;
may she be an authentic place
of communion ;
may she carry out fully her mission
of proclaiming, celebrating and serving
the Gospel of hope
for the peace and joy of all.

Queen of Peace,
Protect the men and women of the third millennium!
Watch over all Christians :
may they advance confidently
on the path of unity,
as a leaven of harmony for the continent.
Watch over young people :
the hope of the future,
may they respond with generosity
to the call of Jesus.
Watch over the leaders of nations :
may they be committed
to building a common house
which respects the dignity and rights
of every person.

Mary, *give us Jesus!*

Grant that we may follow him and love him!

He is the hope of the Church,
of Europe and of all humanity!

He lives with us, in our midst, in his Church!

With you we say :

“Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22 :20).

May the hope of glory

which he has poured into our hearts

bear fruits of justice and peace!

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 28 June, the Vigil of the
Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in the year 2003, the
twenty-fifth of my Pontificate.*

JOHN PAUL II