



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SYNOD
OF THE ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF SERBIA***

Thursday, 6 February 2003

1. With deep joy, I greet you, dear Brothers, and with sentiments of fraternal charity, I welcome your Delegation to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Through you I greet the venerable Patriarch Pavle with the Holy Synod and all the Bishops, clergy, monks and faithful of your Holy Church.

2. The presence of your Delegation in Rome and our meeting today at the beginning of the third millennium are not only very important but also fill us all with hope. Indeed, the last decade of the 20th century has been marked by many sorrowful events which have caused unspeakable suffering to the Balkan peoples. Unfortunately there have been injustices and their authors have not hesitated to exploit religious and patriotic feeling and values to inflict deeper wounds on their neighbour.

The Churches have not failed in their task of appealing to all the parties involved for peace, the re-establishment of justice and respect for the rights of every person, regardless of their race or religious belief. As is well known, the Holy See has often raised its voice unequivocally and impartially, and I personally did not fail to do so before and during the attacks on the population of your country, especially in 1999.

3. The recent past is strongly impressed on the human memory; it has caused great confusion in judgements and deep distress in those who have suffered painful losses or were forced to abandon everything they owned. The Churches now have the mission of fulfilling the role of the Good Samaritan. They must alleviate the common suffering, tend the wounds and promote the purification of memory that will result in sincere forgiveness and fraternal collaboration. I am glad that many initiatives of this kind have already been undertaken and I hope they will continue

through the generous contribution of all in your country, at the local and regional level. With regard to the Catholic Church, also present in Serbia and the neighbouring countries, I assure you that she will not shirk this duty and will not fail to make her contribution.

4. Today, the Churches face new needs and challenges that derive from the inexorable transformation of the European continent. The Christian identity of Europe, whose original form was shaped by the two traditions of West and East, sometimes seems to be under dispute. This can only force us to seek and promote every form of collaboration that enables Orthodox and Catholics to join in giving a vivid and convincing testimony of their common tradition. This witness will prove effective not only in the affirmation of Gospel values such as peace, the dignity of the person, the defence of life and justice in contemporary society, but also in the coming together and consolidation of that brotherhood which must define ecclesial relations between Catholics and Orthodox.

Throughout the centuries, even in great adversity, your Church undertook to spread the Gospel among the Serbian people and in this way contributed to promote the Christian identity of Europe. Faithful to the apostolic tradition, she has proclaimed the Good News of salvation with perseverance, impressing upon Serbian society a strong cultural stamp, which is evident, among other things, in the striking architecture of the churches and monasteries. This heritage does not only belong to you; all other Christians are also proud of it. I hope and wish that Europe will find the appropriate means to preserve it wherever it has flourished and develops.

5. Dear Brethren, I thank you for your visit. It is a sign to me that God's Spirit is guiding the Church toward the re-establishment of that unity of all Christ's disciples for which he prayed on the eve of his death. Let us ask the Lord to give us the fortitude to continue on this path with confidence, patience and courage. Please convey my cordial and fraternal greetings to His Beatitude Patriarch Pavle, and to all the members of your Church. I assure you of my prayers that the Lord, who guides our steps, may accompany you during your visit, a reason for hope for the growth of our mutual relations.