

VISIT TO ROME OF CHRISTODOULOS
ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE

December 13-16, 2006

THE DISCOURSE OF H.B. CHRISTODOULOS

December 14, 2006

Your Holiness and Pope of Rome,

Today, we come with joy from the Apostolic Church of Athens on pilgrimage to the monuments of the saints, and most particularly that of St Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, the founder of our Church which is located in the famous city of ancient Rome.

We come to prostrate ourselves at the tomb of the Holy Apostle Peter and to pay homage to the martyrs of the catacombs and to the Greek Saints, Cyril and Methodius, equals to the Apostles.

We come to pray that the truth of Christ may shine out in the world by striving to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph 4:3*), so that we may “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (*Eph 4:15*).

We come, as Primate of the most holy Church of Greece, with joy to pay our first visit to you, as Bishop of this city, at your courteous invitation.

We come to you, an eminent theologian and university professor who diligently researched ancient Greek thought and that of the Greek Fathers of the East, but also the one who hopes for Christian unity and the cooperation of the religions to assure peace to the whole world.

We remember our previous meeting, on 8 April 2005, the day of blessed Pope John Paul II's funeral.

The Visit to Athens of this great Pope of eternal memory and our meeting on 4 May 2001, at which we had the opportunity to exchange words of love and truth, marked our common desire to lay the first cornerstone on which to build understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and the purification of the Church's memory.

Today, we give thanks to God for the opportunity to be able to exchange with Your Holiness the brotherly kiss of charity and thus move on to a new stage in our Churches' common journey in order to face the problems of the contemporary world.

Our Churches' perpetuation of the veneration of the holy relics was frequently highlighted on the occasion of the courteous presentation of these relics by the Church of Rome to various metropolitan dioceses and places of pilgrimage of our Church. In the next few hours we are expecting to receive a precious fragment of the chains of the Holy Apostle Paul that will be preserved with great reverence in the most holy Church of Athens.

We recall with great pleasure that official delegations of the Church of Greece have visited the Holy See, especially after 2002, who are responsible for deepening our mutual knowledge and for providing information and cooperating in the areas of society, culture, education, ecology and bioethics.

We recall among others the official delegations sent to the Church of Greece, led by Cardinal Walter Kasper in 2003, and others, led respectively by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi and Cardinal Angelo Scola.

Let us also recall the visits to us of Bishop Vincenzo Apicella, who led an ecclesiastical delegation from the Diocese of Rome, and of Bishop Josef Homayer, President emeritus of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), who emphasized the importance of the constant collaboration with this Commission of our Church's delegation to the European Union, and through this cooperation, of bearing a credible witness to the Europeans of the 21st century through the Gospel of life, grace and freedom.

We must mention the numerous members of our Church, ecclesiastics and lay people, who did their advanced studies in Roman Catholic educational establishments; they benefited from the scholarships awarded by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In turn, as an antidote to this fraternal gift, in recent years we have awarded scholarships to 50 Roman Catholic ecclesiastics and novices studying in Rome that have enabled them to learn Greek and acquire familiarity with the Greek culture and the Orthodox tradition. We are especially eager to continue this programme of knowledge and cooperation.

On this occasion, we would like to stress more specifically the good collaboration established between our Churches for the publication of the facsimile edition of the *Menologion* of Basil II, which is one of the most important illuminated Byzantine manuscripts that is preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library.

We recall all this, as well as the lively hope that we will be able to surmount the dogmatic obstacles that stand in the way of unity in the faith to enrich our prayers and strengthen our desire to live, through consensus, full unity, and to receive Communion under the species of the Body and precious Blood of Our Lord in the same chalice of life. To this effect, we wish the International Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church success in its work.

The conditions that shape the new face of the world today, and especially the face of Europe, require vigilance on our part — as spiritual fathers of the devout members of our Churches — in order to quickly identify all that threatens the values and structures of the European civilization which is deeply steeped in the Christian faith.

These threats include : the current of thought that extols the gradual de-Christianization of Europe , whose aim is the exclusion of the Church from public life and her social marginalization; the problems created by the displacement of thousands of refugees and migrants of various origins; the dangers deriving from religious fanaticism; the presumptuous developments , verging on offence ('upptg), in the Greek sense of the word, of biotechnology in the sphere of genetics ; the widening gap between the rich and poor; the risks to which youth are exposed; the possibility of a clash of civilizations and regions ; the need to preserve the spiritual and cultural identity of European citizens and of the family, the cell of society; the debasement and depreciation of the human being, and what is more, often under cover of human rights ; the frenzy of consumerism cultivated in every possible way, and its corollary, the production of a lifestyle conditioned by pleasure as the only value , regardless of its psychological cost. In short, numerous social problems , of which you have often spoken, are real challenges to us that we are prepared to confront in the true spirit of life in Christ . In this case, the contribution of the Orthodox theological and pastoral approach is absolutely necessary.

It is the Church's duty to stretch out her hand to save those who are drowning in the torrent of Baal. She feels that in the contemporary , media-dominated world she must adopt the modern means of communication and speak the current language of the people of our time . She must do this without allowing the technical instruments to change her discourse or the communications technology to warp her message.

She feels obliged to oppose the State and the superpowers of this world whenever she considers their decisions harmful to the living image of God on earth. She must do this without succumbing to the temptation of feeling that she herself is a power of this world.

Now invoking the intercession of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, as well as our holy Athenian Predecessors, Anacletus, Hyginus and Sixtus II, we wish you personally, Your Holiness, good health and a long life. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (*1 Thes* 2:16-17).

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