



Applause greets apology from Pope

By PAUL WOOD
in Athens

POPE JOHN Paul used a historic visit to Greece yesterday to issue a sweeping apology for the sins of Roman Catholics against the Orthodox faithful, part of his attempt to heal the 1,000-year breach between the churches.

The Pontiff said: "For occasions past and present, when the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by actions and omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of him."

The apology came during a long meeting with the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, who had lambasted the Pope to his face for Rome's actions since the Great Schism of 1054, when Christianity split into Eastern and Western branches.

Archbishop Christodoulos gave a long list of grievances ranging from the "destructive mania" of the crusaders during the sack of Constantinople in 1204 to the plight of modern Cyprus. He said there were "open wounds" on the "vigorous body" of the Orthodox faithful inflicted by the Roman Catholic Church. "Yet until now there has not been heard even a single request for a pardon."

Yet after the Pope's apology, Archbishop Christodoulos burst into astonished applause. The two later embraced. "I am very happy," the archbishop said. "The Pope was very nice to us, but of course there are still problems between our two churches that we have to face."

All smiles as the Pope talks to Archbishop Christodoulos after his historic apology for Rome's old sins EPA