



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS, OFFICIALS AND STAFF
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY**

Thursday, 19 February 1998

Your Eminence,

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,*¹ I have frequently expressed my hope that on the threshold of the third millennium Christians may find themselves if not completely united, at least much closer to resolving their differences (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 34). In reviewing the activities of the past two years, the plenary session of your Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has wished to situate its reflection in this perspective. In my Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, I wished to stress the importance of one of the fruits of the ecumenical movement: *rediscovered brotherhood among Christians*. I continuously experience this in my apostolic journeys throughout the world. Christians, regardless of their differences and the validity of what divides them, have acquired a renewed awareness of being brothers and sisters to one another. I ask you: is this not the revival of a fundamentally Christian attitude? And by acting this way are we not fulfilling the primary requirement of the commandment Jesus wished to call "his" (cf. Jn 15:12)? Our awareness of being brothers requires that we regard ourselves as brothers even in our disagreements; it calls us to treat each other as brothers in the various circumstances where our personal and community life brings us together. In this area continual progress is essential. We cannot be satisfied with intermediary stages, necessary perhaps, but always insufficient on the spiritual and ecclesial journey to which we are committed. The goal, to which the Lord Jesus calls us, guides us and expects of us, is full unity with all those who, having received the same Baptism, have become part of the one Mystical Body.² In this atmosphere of rediscovered brotherhood, your reflection on current relations between the Christian Churches and Communions acquires its full significance, just as the various theological dialogues also acquire their full significance. They are based on the dialogue of love, which must continue to accompany and nourish them. It is necessary to deepen the dialogue of love in order to overcome the difficulties which occurred in the past and still exist today, and which we will continue to encounter. In this context, on this intellectual journey, we must also make gradual progress. The progress achieved fills us with joy; it increases the authenticity of the rediscovered brotherhood. However, these are only stages, and we cannot be content with having completed them. Our steps must advance even further in this direction. We must help one another. We will need courage to pursue our search for the truth in fidelity to the One who is the Truth. The goal is the full communion he wants to see

prevail among us. Two thousand years ago he asked us to bear unanimous witness to his coming. In this age, when we are urging the world to recognize fully that Christ is "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9), we must reinvigorate our efforts, in order to fulfil our one Teacher and Lord's desire for unity. The progress made in the dialogue of love and conversion, as well as in the doctrinal dialogues, fills our heart with gratitude and hope. Gratitude for all that has been given and is being given to us. Hope in him who is the only One to bring to completion what he alone could and can fulfil in our midst.³ Thus during your plenary session you reviewed your activities over the past two years. You have been able to note what must be corrected and what must be intensified. You have also looked to the future. The ecumenical formation of those who will dedicate themselves to pastoral ministry in the years ahead assumes a particular importance in this future perspective. Assimilation of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the Church and on ecumenism is the condition for disseminating the intermediate results of dialogue in a sound way. As I have stressed, "they cannot remain the statements of bilateral commissions but must become a common heritage" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 80). Those responsible for pastoral activity must acquire a global vision of ecumenical activity, its principles and requirements. This vision will be the means and the context enabling them to situate and understand, to receive and rigorously examine what has been achieved. They will thus be able to inform the faithful and to involve them in an attitude of gratitude and hope. They will be able to avoid simplifications and untimely haste. They will help them to adapt to the pace that the Holy Spirit sets for the movement he inspires in the Church. They will encourage them to deepen their ecumenical conversion and to grow in their rediscovered brotherhood. They will urge them to intensify their prayer so that full communion will soon be achieved.⁴ As I thank you for the work you have done at your meeting and for your impassioned service to unity, I would like to remind you of St Cyprian's words on the Lord's Prayer at the end of my Encyclical Letter on commitment to ecumenism: "'God does not accept the sacrifice of a sower of disunion, but commands that he depart from the altar so that he may first be reconciled with his brother. For God can be appeased only by prayers that make peace. To God, the better offering is peace, brotherly concord and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit". At the dawn of the new millennium, how can we not implore from the Lord, with renewed enthusiasm and a deeper awareness, the grace to prepare ourselves, together, to offer this *sacrifice of unity*?" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 102). I repeat this prayer with deep feeling, and I ask the Lord to support you in everything you do to help the Bishop of Rome in his service to unity, with trust in the work of divine mercy. With these sentiments, I affectionately impart my Blessing to all. © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana