



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO REV. DR. SAMUEL KOBIA
AND THE MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION
FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

Thursday, 16 June 2005

Dear General Secretary,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Phil* 1:2). With these words of Saint Paul, I gladly welcome you and the members of the delegation from the World Council of Churches. After your installation as General Secretary you had planned to visit my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II. Though this hope was never realized, I thank you for representing the World Council of Churches at his funeral, and I express my gratitude for the message which you sent to me on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of my own ministry as Bishop of Rome.

Relations between the Catholic Church and the World Council developed during the Second Vatican Council, where two observers from Geneva were present at all four sessions. This led in 1965 to the establishment of the Joint Working Group as an instrument of ongoing contact and cooperation, which would keep in mind the common task of unity in answer to the Lord’s own prayer, “that they may all be one” (*Jn.* 17:21). Next November an important consultation on the future of the Joint Working Group will be held to mark the fortieth anniversary of its founding. My hope and prayer is that its purpose and working methodology will be further clarified for the sake of ever more effective ecumenical understanding, cooperation and progress.

In the very first days of my Pontificate I stated that my “primary task is the duty to work tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity of all Christ’s followers.” This requires, in addition to good intentions, “concrete gestures which enter hearts and stir consciences... inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress” (*Missa pro ecclesia*, 5).

Pope John Paul II often recalled that the heart of the search for Christian unity is “spiritual ecumenism”. He saw its core in terms of being in Christ: “To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: “*Ut unum sint*” (Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, 9).

It is my hope that your visit to the Holy See has been fruitful, strengthening the bonds of understanding and friendship between us. The commitment of the Catholic Church to the search for Christian unity is irreversible. I therefore wish to assure you that she is eager to continue cooperation with the World Council of Churches. Again, I offer a special word of encouragement to you, Mr General Secretary, to the members of the Central Committee and to the entire staff, as you work to lead and renew this important ecumenical body. Please know that you are in my prayers and that you have my unfailing goodwill. “May grace and peace be yours in abundance” (2 Pt 1:2).

© Copyright 2005 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana