



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 25 November 1998*

### ***Spirit leads Church on path of renewal***

1. In the previous catechesis we reflected on the “signs of hope” present in our world. Today we would like to continue our reflection, examining some of the “signs of hope” present in the Church so that Christian communities can have an ever better understanding and appreciation of them. They stem from the action of the Holy Spirit who, down the centuries, “by the power of the Gospel ... permits the Church to keep the freshness of youth. Constantly he renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 4).

Among the ecclesial events that have left a deep mark on our century, the most important is the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Through it the Church took from her treasury “what is new and what is old” (cf. *Mt* 13:52) and experienced in a certain way the grace of a renewed Pentecost (cf. *Address of John XXIII at the close of the Council's first period*, III, in *Discorsi, Messaggi, Colloqui* V [1962/1963], p. 29). If we look closely, the signs of hope which enliven the Church’s mission today are closely connected with this abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit which the Church experienced in the preparation, celebration and application of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Listening to what “the Spirit is saying to the Church and to the Churches” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 23; cf. *Rv* 2:7ff.) is expressed in acceptance of the *charisms* which he distributes in abundance. Their rediscovery and appreciation has developed a more intense communion between the various vocations of the People of God, such as a renewed, joyful enthusiasm for evangelization.

Today especially, the Holy Spirit is spurring the Church to promote *the vocation and mission of the*

*lay faithful*. Their participation and co-responsibility in the life of the Christian community and the many forms of their apostolate and service in society give us reason, at the dawn of the third millennium, to await with hope a *mature and fruitful “epiphany” of the laity*. A similar expectation concerns the role that *woman* is called to assume. As in civil society, so in the Church the “*feminine genius*” is becoming more and more apparent, and it must be increasingly promoted in ways appropriate to the vocation of woman according to God’s plan.

Moreover, we cannot forget that one of the gifts the Spirit has generously bestowed in our time is the flourishing of *ecclesial movements*, which from the beginning of my Pontificate I have continued to point to as a cause of hope for the Church and for society. They “are a sign of the freedom of forms in which the one Church is expressed, and they represent a sound newness, which still waits to be adequately understood in all its positive effectiveness for the kingdom of God at work in the present moment of history”, (*Insegnamenti* VII/2 [1984], p. 696).

3. Our century has also seen the seed of the *ecumenical movement* blossom and grow. In this movement the Holy Spirit has led the members of the various Ecclesial Communities to seek the ways of dialogue in order to re-establish full unity.

In particular, thanks to the Second Vatican Council, the search for unity and ecumenical concern have unquestionably become “a necessary dimension of the whole life of the Church”, and a priority commitment to which the Catholic Church “wants to contribute in every possible way” (*Insegnamenti* VIII/1 [1985], pp 1991, 1999). The dialogue of *truth*, preceded and accompanied by the dialogue of *charity*, is gradually achieving remarkable results. There is also a stronger awareness that the real soul of the movement to restore Christian unity is spiritual ecumenism, that is, conversion of heart, prayer and holiness of life (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 8).

4. Lastly, among the many other signs of hope, I would like to mention “the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 46).

As to the former, one need only recall the prophetic significance that the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra aetate* on the Church's relations with non-Christian religions has gradually assumed. Many experiences of meeting and dialogue at various levels have taken place and are taking place in every part of the world between representatives of the different religions. I am pleased to mention in particular the great progress that has been made in the dialogue with the Jews, our “elder brothers”.

An important sign of hope for humanity is that the religions are trustingly engaged in dialogue and feel the urgent need to join forces to encourage progress and to contribute to the moral commitment of nations. Faith in the constant action of the Spirit gives us hope that also by this path of mutual concern and esteem it will be possible for everyone to be open to Christ, the true Light that “enlightens every man” (*Jn* 1:9).

As for the dialogue with culture, the attitude expressed by the Second Vatican Council is showing its providential effectiveness: “Just as it is in the world’s interest to acknowledge the Church as a social reality and a driving force in history, so too the Church is not unaware of how much she has profited from the history and development of mankind” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 44). Contacts made in this area have already overcome unwarranted prejudices. The new attention paid by the various cultural currents of our time to religious experience, and to Christianity in particular, spurs us to persevere on the path we have chosen towards a fresh meeting between the Gospel and culture.

5. In these many signs of hope, we cannot fail to recognize the action of God’s Spirit. However, in full dependence upon and in communion with him, I also like to see in them the role of Mary, “as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 56). Mary intercedes for the Church as a mother and leads her on the path of holiness and docility to the Paraclete. At the dawn of the new millennium, we can joyfully discern that “Marian profile” of the Church (cf. *Insegnamenti X/3* [1987], p. 1483) which epitomizes the deepest meaning of conciliar renewal.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today, we reflect on some of the “signs of hope” present in the Church. These signs are closely connected to the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit which the Church experienced in the preparation, celebration and application of the Second Vatican Council.

Among other things, the fruits of the Council have included a better understanding of the specific vocation and mission of the laity, a more active role for women in the Church, and the spread of various ecclesial movements. Ecumenism too has grown, and Christians have become more aware that unity requires prayer, conversion of heart and holiness of life.

With the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary always before us, may all Christ’s faithful be ever obedient to the Spirit as they continue along the path of authentic renewal.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

I warmly greet the many English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at this audience, especially those from the United States, Canada and India. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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