



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO NON-CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Monday, 21 May 1979 Dearly beloved in Christ, AS BISHOP OF ROME I welcome you to this Apostolic See. It is especially gratifying to know that you have come for ecumenical consultation on the religious life. Your visit therefore is a propitious moment to reflect together briefly on this theme, and through this reflection to experience the joy of a common acceptance of so many great ideals of the religious life. Among these ideals is the pivotal concept of religious life as a special consecration to our Lord Jesus Christ, as a means of adhering totally to his divine person and of fulfilling all the exigencies of Baptism in Christ. Religious life is the radical pursuit of the Beatitudes; the practical recognition of the absolute primacy of Christ in the Church and in the world. It is a free response of disciples to the invitation of the Lord Jesus: "Abide in my love"[1]. The Second Vatican Council looks upon religious life as being ordered to the greater holiness of the Church and to the greater glory of the Blessed Trinity, which in Christ and through Christ is the source and origin of all holiness[2]. It sees all the fruitful ecclesial service of religious as resulting from intimate union with Christ[3]. Any consideration of religious life as a new and special title of fulfilling the universal call of all God's people to holiness brings us, moreover, of necessity to the ecclesial aspect of religious life. In the history of the Church, the ecclesiastical authority has guaranteed the authenticity of this life, and this life has constantly been viewed in its relationship to the entire Body of Christ, in which the activities of each member and of communities are advantageous to the whole Body by reason of the principle of dynamic union with Christ the Head. Through God's grace I am confident that your ecumenical consultation on such important subjects will bring forth fruit that will last. I pray that the Holy Spirit will himself shed light on your reflection of religious life, especially as it touches the question of Church unity – the perfect unity willed by Christ. Who more than religious should experience in prayer the urgency, not only of manifesting unity, but also of living it in the fullness of truth and charity? And as we experience this urgency – an experience which is itself a gift of God – do we not likewise experience the need for that increased personal purification, for that ever greater conversion of heart that God seems to be requiring as a prerequisite for the restoration of the corporate unity of all Christians? And does not the spiritual freedom that religious endeavour to acquire in adhering totally to the Lord Jesus bind them ever more closely, in love, to pursue to the end the will of Christ for his Church? Are religious not called in a special way to give expression to the yearning of Christians that the ecumenical dialogue – which by its nature is temporary – should be brought to term in that full ecclesial fellowship which is "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ"[4]? Should religious not be the first to pledge the fullness of their generosity before God's salvific plan, each one repeating with Saint Paul: "What am I to do, Lord?"[5]. Dear brothers and sisters, this is a moment of joy, not founded in complacency, but in humble and repentant desire to fulfill the will of God. It is at the same time a moment of confidence "in Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption"[6]. To him we turn our hearts as we invoke

the power of his merits to sustain us as we await, in generosity and sacrifice, the full revelation of his Kingdom, the consummation of our unity in Christ: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done". I would ask you to take back to your religious communities my greeting and encouragement to live deeply "by faith in the Son of God"[7]. With the expression of my friendship and esteem I send the assurance of my love in Christ Jesus our

Lord.

[1] *Io.* 15, 9. [2] Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 47. [3] Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8. [4] *1 Io.* 1, 3. [5] *Act.* 22, 10. [6] *1 Cor.* 1, 30. [7] *Gal.* 2, 20. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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