



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN
CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

Saturday, 5 October 1985

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Members of the Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "Peace be with you" (*Io. 20, 26*).

1. Thank you most warmly for coming to see me during your meeting at Riano. I value your visit highly especially because this year is the twentieth anniversary of the setting up of the Joint Working Group, and I wish to associate myself with you in thanking God for what has been achieved in that time and in renewing the desire to go along the paths which he will show us.

As you know, *I am convinced of the necessary place of Catholic collaboration with the World Council of Churches* and its member Churches and have repeatedly asked that it should increase wherever possible. That is why I visited the Council at its Ecumenical Centre in Geneva last year. I regard that visit as an important part of the pastoral office which places me in a special way at the service of unity. I would like to see the positive impulse given by that visit translated into action for the benefit of our collaboration and of the ecumenical movement as a whole.

Over the past twenty years the *Joint Working Group* has gone about its task modestly and discreetly and perhaps for that reason its importance has not been fully appreciated. It has done much *to keep collaboration alive and develop it*, and it has done so with the confidence of its authorities. The work of the Group is one in which you can feel proud to take part. It calls for your best gifts, your imagination, your courage and a deep sense of responsibility. It is a service you give to the whole ecumenical movement, for collaboration between the Catholic Church and the

World Council of Churches has an importance that is both practical and highly symbolic for that movement.

2. When the Joint Working Group was set up it was clearly recognized that the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church are not comparable organisms. On the one hand there is the Council, which is a community of many Churches and Ecclesial Communities of different confessional traditions. On the other hand there is the Catholic Church, with all her pastoral responsibility as Church. Therefore collaboration poses particular problems. Furthermore, the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches do not have the same approach to all issues. Necessarily then the way of collaboration is at times limited. This makes your task more difficult, but not impossible and no less important. *It means that you are working with the real problems of our divisions which, through God's grace, the ecumenical movement enables us to face with hope and determination.*

Among the various aspects of your task is first of all collaboration between the appropriate partners on the Catholic side and the various sub-units and programmes of the Council. I said recently that a fruitful collaboration has developed since 1965 "in the social field and in the sphere of the search for Justice and peace; on the problems of mission and evangelization as well as the dialogue with the other religions" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad Patres Cardinales Romanaeque Curiae Sodales habita*, die 28 iun. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 1 (1985) 1987 ss). It must be your concern to be alert to the possibilities and encourage them wisely.

The Joint Working Group also has a role to play in searching out promising areas for study and investigation in the quest for unity. Here it can support and complement the important work being done together in the Faith and Order Commission. Since it looks to collaboration as a whole, the Joint Working Group must always focus on the visible unity which is the goal of the ecumenical movement. There is likewise room for it to take up some of the broad questions facing Christians in their mission in the world.

Without repeating what is already being done by the different Catholic or World Council agencies, there does seem to be a place too for more systematic ecumenical discussion of questions such as the handing on of the faith today, the nature of secularism and its consequences, the problems of culture and world peace. "There is a need above all to be always docile to the Holy Spirit and to how the Holy Spirit speaks to the Churches today (Cfr. *Apoc.* 2, 7). There is a need to have concern, in everything and wherever possible, that we give joint witness to Christ and his Gospel in our world, so rich today in possibilities but also afflicted by so many ills" (*Ibid.*).

3. When the Joint Working Group was founded, Cardinal Bea said that *one of its tasks would be dialogue*. This is not only the theological discussion which takes place in Faith and Order.

It also means the continuing relation between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches which, like all relationships, calls for unceasing communication, acts of friendship and courtesy, careful attention to each other, a concern for each other's joys and sorrows and great occasions. This dimension of dialogue can be easily overlooked under the pressure of daily work, but surely *it is more necessary in these times when the ecumenical movement has advanced so greatly that we are facing some of the important questions which divide us.*

Not least the Joint Working Group will interpret the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches to each other; it will interpret what is happening on the international level to those working locally; it will interpret the ecumenical movement to a wider audience. By now it has a certain accumulated wisdom which enables it, from time to time, to give clear expression to some aspects of collaboration or of the ecumenical movement. Its role can be to stir the imagination, to interpret, to stimulate, to give counsel which will consolidate the steps toward unity.

My hopes for your work are high and I encourage you in it. I pray that God may give you the vision, the perseverance, the patience and the insight which it demands. May he bless you and your families and all those for whom you are responsible. "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Petr. 1, 2).

© Copyright 1985 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana