



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

POPE JOHN PAUL II

**ON OCCASION OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE SECOND PHASE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL REFORMED-CATHOLIC
DIALOGUE COMMISSION** Thursday, 7 January 1988

Dear Friends in Christ,

1. It is a great joy for me to meet with you today, on the occasion of the fifth meeting of the second phase of the *International Reformed-Catholic dialogue commission*. Through dialogue sustained by prayer you are seeking solutions to the problems that have divided our communities for centuries.

With God's help you will be able to make a valid contribution to the restoration of unity among Christians. As I welcome you warmly to this city, where the Apostles Peter and Paul shed their blood in witness to Christ, I assure you of my prayerful support.

The work you are engaged in is important because divisions among Christians are contrary to Christ's will. Ecumenical dialogue is a means which God's providence uses to overcome this tragic situation. Whatever the reasons that caused it, disunity among Christians hinders the Church's mission of proclaiming and spreading the Gospel, and *raises obstacles to experiencing fully the reconciliation which is at the heart of the saving mysteries of Christ*. I would repeat what I wrote concerning the earlier phase of Reformed-Catholic dialogue to Dr James McCord in 1982, when he was President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches: "The path we have walked together permits of no going back, only of further progress" (Die 26 iul. 1982).

2. Your dialogue does not take place in a vacuum, but is supported by the many factors which show the real, though imperfect communion already existing between us. Baptism, as the Decree on Ecumenism says, "constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22). It is also our common faith that "there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 *Tim.* 2, 5-6). Jesus Christ alone is "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (*Io.* 14, 6), the cornerstone, the head of the Church which is his Body. The Second Vatican Council pointed out the many elements

that Catholics share in common with other Christians, as well as differences between us (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 19-23, *Lumen Gentium*, 15). We have much to build on therefore in our efforts to achieve deeper fellowship, and to work towards perfect unity in faith.

Dialogue helps us to learn from one another, and *to go more deeply into the truth* (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4). But in this process we always need to be open to the Spirit who, as Scripture teaches, guides us into all truth (Cfr. *Io.* 15, 26). All our efforts at reconciliation – prayer, dialogue, collaboration, common witness – must be linked to the conviction that the Holy Spirit, if we are open to his prompting, can lead us out of the scandal of division. Our commitment to the ecumenical task requires in us a faith deep enough to allow ourselves to be led by him to reconciliation.

3. The Second Vatican Council spoke of ecumenism in this context of faith. The movement for the restoration of unity, it said, is “fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). It also expressed the hope that our ecumenical initiatives “will go forward, without obstructing the ways of Divine Providence, and without prejudicing the future inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (*Ibid.* 24).

These words of the Council capture something of the profound importance of the efforts of Christians to heal divisions. In seeking reconciliation we are truly responding to God’s will.

I express my thanks to you for what you have done thus far, and I ask God to sustain you in the cause of Christian unity, for his own glory: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (*Eph.* 3, 20).

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