



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "FAITH AND ORDER"
STANDING COMMISSION**

Monday, 24 June 1991

Dear Friends,

I am pleased that your presence in Rome enables me to welcome you to the Vatican, and to greet the members and guests of the *Faith and Order Standing Commission*, Led by your Moderator Dr Mary Tanner, and the Director Dr Gunther Gassman.

The *Faith and Order* movement was an important factor in the establishment of the World Council of Churches, and ever since, as a commission within the Council, *Faith and Order* has continued to play a vital role in the whole ecumenical movement. Its special contribution has been to keep before divided Christians the goal of seeking visible unity in the one Apostolic Faith, a unity which will have its highest ecclesial expression in Eucharistic Communion. In the Catholic view of ecumenism, the task of achieving, with God's grace, the full visible unity of Christians must always be a priority. Partial relationships between Christians, with do not yet express full communion in faith, the sacraments of faith, and order, are never enough; not least because disunity continues to put obstacles in the way of the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples.

We are all vividly aware that the world is passing through a time of radical change filled with great opportunities for the human family but also with enormous difficulties and dangers. People everywhere are seeking the values upon which to build their societies and their lives. They need to hear the message of God's saving grace spoken "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6). They need to hear "the message of reconciliation" which has been entrusted to us in the Gospel (2 Cor. 5:19). But the efforts of Christians to witness to the Lord are often obscured by our divisions.

We must not lose hope. The difficulties along the path of ecumenical understanding must not

discourage us. Rather they should impel us to commit ourselves and our ecclesial communities with fresh vigour to the task at hand, for it is the Lord himself who urges us to seek the unity he prayed for, so that the world may believe (Cf. Jn. 17:21). That unity revolves in a special way around agreement on the nature of the Church and her mission. Here again, *Faith and Order* can continue to play a major role by fostering the theological studies which light the path towards greater agreement in the Apostolic Faith.

It is my hope and prayer that your efforts, especially in the field of ecclesiology and in preparation for the next World Conference on *Faith and Order* in 1993, will strengthen interest and concern for the theological aspects of the dialogue between divided Christians. May God bless you and your loved ones.

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