



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE
ON "CATHOLIC-LUTHERAN RELATIONS"**

*Consistory Hall
Tuesday, 14 March 1995*

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet the participants in the Conference on *Catholic–Lutheran Relations* which has been taking place at the International Bridgettine Centre at Farfa. I am happy to greet Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Cassidy, Bishop Jonas Jonson of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, the members of the Scientific Board of the Farfa Centre with its chairman Professor Peder Nørsgaard–Höjen, and Mother Tekla, Abbess General of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour. For three days you have been reflecting on the Catholic–Lutheran dialogue as it has developed during the last three decades since the end of the Second Vatican Council, on the progress made so far, on the challenges still to be faced, and on future prospects.

2. Certainly we must be grateful to Almighty God that during the last thirty years much has been done to overcome the barriers of separation and to strengthen the substantial, constitutive bonds of unity already existing between us. This is the fruit of theological dialogue and practical co–operation. Your Conference has been an opportunity to examine the specific achievements of this process of rapprochement. A very fundamental stage of dialogue was reached when the doctrine of justification became the central issue, and we must look forward with confidence to the document on which Lutherans and Catholics are now hard at work and which aims at expressing a common understanding of this central theme of our faith.

3. All these developments are a strong indication of the fact that what we have in common is much

more than what divides us. And yet, we are all conscious of how difficult it can be in practice to give their just weight to the realities which unite us and to put aside deeply rooted habits of emphasizing the points, important as they are, which continue to stand in the way of full, visible unity. In view of the approaching new Christian Millennium, I wish to encourage you to redouble your efforts to advance along the path of authentic ecumenical understanding, "so that we can celebrate the Great Jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 34).

4. Our meeting today gives me the opportunity to thank all of you, and all those who at different levels and in various ways are working to achieve this goal, putting their time, ideas and theological knowledge at the service of Christian unity. When we look at what has already been achieved, we have every reason to face the future with confidence grounded in faith. Such confidence is justified because we trust that the Lord himself who has begun the good work within us will bring it to completion (cf. Phil. 1:6). May his peace and love be with you!

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