



The Holy See

LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO FRIENDS OF FOCOLARE

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I had wanted to meet you on the occasion of the convention that every year brings you together as friends of the Focolare Unity Movement. This not being possible, I would at least like you to receive my written greetings and the assurance of my closeness in the charity of Christ.

These days have been a favourable occasion to renew together the deep bonds of communion which, through the Holy Spirit, unite you in harmonious dedication to the service of the Bride of Christ on the eve of the forthcoming millennium.

The eyes of all are turned towards that historic date when we will be celebrating the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In this light, your convention has wanted to study more deeply the meaning of the Bishop's mission in relation to the mandate Christ entrusted to his Apostles. You have reflected especially on the risen Christ's presence in the community through the new commandment of love.

2. As everyone knows, the Christological theme marks 1997, the first of the three years of immediate preparation for the Holy Year. In preparing to celebrate the Jubilee, the Church wishes to centre her attention on "Christ, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit" (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 40). The Father sends his Son and the Son, accepting his mission, becomes man by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin of Nazareth. "And the word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). The history of salvation is totally woven of love. The Word is the Son eternally loved and eternally loving. How can we fail to be filled with wonder at the mystery of Love?

There is an extraordinary outpouring of God's love in the mystery of the Incarnation: the descent of

the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary. The Evangelist Luke writes: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35).

3. However the Incarnation cannot be separated from Christ’s Death and Resurrection. The Apostles saw and met the Risen One: this extraordinary event transformed them into witnesses filled with joy and apostolic zeal. Today, as then, the apostle’s principal task is to proclaim and witness with his life that Christ is truly risen, that he is present among us through the new commandment he left us.

Divine charity is a testament of life which, if practised daily, enables us to achieve that deeper unity which Jesus himself intensely implored from the Father at the Last Supper: “That they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21). Only the commandment of love, a love that becomes a total gift of life, is the secret of the Resurrection.

Here we are in the heart of Christian newness. In the silence of prayer and contemplation we can come into contact with Christ and listen to his words: “The Father loves me, because I lay down my life.... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again” (Jn 10:17-18). For the Church's Pastors, therefore, a spirituality of communion means commitment to the total gift of self; it means considering the cross of one as the cross of the other.

4. Venerable and dear Brothers, during the work of your convention, reflection *on ecumenism and interreligious* dialogue has occupied a special place, in the light of the supernatural law of divine love. This attention was indeed praiseworthy, precisely with regard to the forthcoming historic celebration of the Jubilee. As the Second Vatican Council states: “Co-operation among Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ” (*Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 12). Ecumenical collaboration is born of a grace granted by the Father in answer to Christ’s prayer (cf. Jn 17:21) and of the Holy Spirit’s action within us (cf. Rom 8:26-27). However, true ecumenism only bears fruit where love increases in an authentic spirit of service to one's brothers and sisters, after the example of Christ who came not to be served, but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28). This is the ecumenism which must have an important place in the life of every Diocese. It should be developed by historical, theological and liturgical study and discussion, as well as by mutual understanding in daily life (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 5).

This ecumenical activity draws strength from constant prayer, trustingly addressed to our common Father in heaven, so that the full unity of all Christians may be hastened.

This is also my wish, which I confirm with the assurance that I will constantly remember you to the Lord. May he accompany you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, and support you in your daily

pastoral ministry.

As I invoke upon your convention the protection of Mary, Mother of Unity, I cordially send you a special Blessing, which I willingly extend to the local Churches entrusted to your care.

From the Vatican, 6 February 1997.

JOHN PAUL II

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