



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO AN ECUMENICAL GROUP
OF CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIANS**

Tuesday, 3 April 2001

Your Eminence,
Dear Sisters and Dear Brothers,

1. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13: 13).

I gladly make my own the desire of the Apostle of the Gentiles, as I welcome you warmly to the Apostolic Palace. I am grateful for the cordial words with which Cardinal Karl Lehmann, your President, introduced your group to me. With him, I also greet the Evangelical Co-President, Bishop Hartmut Löwe.

I am pleased about this meeting that is taking place on the occasion of the conference which your ecumenical group has organized this year in Rome.

2. The increasing awareness of the communion in the Triune God has enabled Christians of different confessions no longer to regard one another as enemies or strangers but as brothers and sisters. The awareness that we belong to Christ, imparted to us with Baptism, has become deeper, especially in the years following the Second Vatican Council. We can be very grateful for this.

Already before this event, which was also important from an ecumenical perspective, the Lord's desire was echoing in many human hearts: *Ut unum sint!* (cf. Jn 17: 21). The echo of this exhortation also resounds in your ecumenical group, which has now existed for more than half a century.

The Second World War destroyed the world of many people. Even the religious cornerstones began to waver. Countless men and women sought safety and support. The late Cardinal Lorenz Jäger and the Lutheran Bishop Wilhelm Stählin recognized these "signs of the times". They gathered Catholic and Evangelical theologians around them, in an attempt to give a world that had fallen apart a new centre in Jesus Christ. So, precisely in 1946, the ecumenical group came into being and pursued its founders' aims even till now. I thank the Lord of history for inspiring these "pioneers of ecumenism" and am confident that your group will continue to be aware of its own origins and also to contribute, as a "laboratory of ecumenism", to achieving unity in the future.

3. The desire for unity accompanies us beyond the threshold of the third millennium. With the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification we reached a milestone in the ecumenical process. During the celebration of the Great Jubilee too, we could once again observe the incisive and prophetic sign of ecumenism.

At the same time, we have realized that the goal of full unity has not yet been reached. The commemoration of Christ's Incarnation reminded us that ecumenical dialogue must be oriented above all to Christ. This dialogue strives in the first place for a vertical dimension which will lead it to the fullness of biblical revelation and the one Redeemer of the world. Thus for all concerned it becomes a "dialogue of conversion".

In this way all realize that love of the truth must be the deepest dimension of a credible search for full Christian unity. Without love of the truth it is impossible to face the theological and psychological difficulties we encounter in examining the differences that still exist. I note gratefully that in you love of truth is accompanied by respect and esteem for your interlocutor. So you will always be able to discover that ecumenical dialogue can be an opportunity for better mutual knowledge and an exchange of spiritual gifts.

4. I am certain that the wish I expressed in my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* will come true: "Theological discussion on essential points of faith and Christian morality, cooperation in works of charity, and above all the great ecumenism of holiness will not fail, with God's help, to bring results" (n. 48).

I see a sign of hope in your choice of Rome as the place for the conference: perhaps one day, with patient dialogue, we may succeed together in finding a way in which the Petrine ministry can carry out a service to truth and love that is recognized by one and all (cf. *Ut unum sint*, n. 95).

May the ecumenical group of Catholic and Evangelical theologians help us in this quest! For this I implore the fullness of the Holy Spirit and an abundance of God's blessings upon you.

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