



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO COLOGNE ON THE OCCASION OF THE XX WORLD YOUTH DAY

### ECUMENICAL MEETING

#### *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI*

*Cologne - Archbishop's House*

*Friday, 19 August 2005*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,* Permit me to remain seated after such a strenuous day. This does not mean I wish to speak "ex cathedra". Also, excuse me for being late. Unfortunately, Vespers took longer than foreseen and the traffic was slower moving than could be imagined. I would like now to express the joy I feel on the occasion of my Visit to Germany, in being able to meet you and offer a warm greeting to you, the Representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. As a native of this Country, I am quite aware of the painful situation which the rupture of unity in the profession of the faith has entailed for so many individuals and families. This was one of the reasons why, immediately following my election as Bishop of Rome, I declared, as the Successor of the Apostle Peter, my firm commitment to making the recovery of full and visible Christian unity a priority of my Pontificate. In doing so, I wished consciously to follow in the footsteps of two of my great Predecessors: Pope Paul VI, who over 40 years ago signed the conciliar Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and Pope John Paul II, who made that Document the inspiration for his activity. In ecumenical dialogue Germany without a doubt has a place of particular importance. We are the Country where the Reformation began; however, Germany is also one of the countries where the ecumenical movement of the 20th century originated. With the successive waves of immigration in the last century, Christians from the Orthodox Churches and the ancient Churches of the East also found a new homeland in this Country. This certainly favoured greater contact and exchanges so that now there is a dialogue between we three. Together we can rejoice in the fact that the dialogue, with the passage of time, has brought about a renewed sense of our brotherhood and has created a more open and trusting climate between Christians belonging to the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities. My venerable Predecessor, in his Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), saw this as an especially significant fruit of

dialogue (cf. nn. 41ff.; 64). I feel the fact that we consider one another brothers and sisters, that we love one another, that together we are witnesses of Jesus Christ, should not be taken so much for granted. I believe that this brotherhood is in itself a very important fruit of dialogue that we must rejoice in, continue to foster and to practice. Among Christians, fraternity is not just a vague sentiment, nor is it a sign of indifference to truth. As you just said, Bishop, it is grounded in the supernatural reality of the one Baptism which makes us all members of the one Body of Christ (cf. I Cor 12: 13; Gal 3: 28; Col 2: 12). Together we confess that Jesus Christ is God and Lord; together we acknowledge him as the one mediator between God and man (cf. I Tm 2: 5), and we emphasize that together we are members of his Body (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 22; *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 42). Based on this essential foundation of Baptism, a reality comes from him which is a way of being, then of professing, believing and acting. Based on this crucial foundation, dialogue has borne its fruits and will continue to do so. I would like to mention the re-examination of the mutual condemnations, called for by John Paul II during his first Visit to Germany. I recall with some nostalgia that first Visit. I was able to be present when we were together at Mainz in a fairly small and authentic fraternal circle. Some questions were put to the Pope and he described a broad theological vision in which reciprocity was amply treated. That colloquium gave rise to an episcopal, that is, a Church commission, under ecclesial responsibility. Finally, with the contribution of theologians it led to the important *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) and to an agreement on basic issues that had been a subject of controversy since the 16th century. We should also acknowledge with gratitude the results of our common stand on important matters, such as the fundamental questions involving the defence of life and the promotion of justice and peace. I am well aware that many Christians in Germany, and not only in this Country, expect further concrete steps to bring us closer together. I myself have the same expectation. It is the Lord's commandment, but also the imperative of the present hour, to carry on dialogue with conviction at all levels of the Church's life. This must obviously take place with sincerity and realism, with patience and perseverance, in complete fidelity to the dictates of one's conscience in the awareness that it is the Lord who gives unity, that we do not create it, that it is he who gives it but that we must go to meet him. I do not intend here to outline a programme for the immediate themes of dialogue - this task belongs to theologians working alongside the Bishops: the theologians, on the basis of their knowledge of the problem; the Bishops from their knowledge of the concrete situation in the Church in our Country and in the world. May I make a small comment: now, it is said that following the clarification regarding the Doctrine of Justification, the elaboration of ecclesiological issues and the questions concerning ministry are the main obstacles still to be overcome. In short, this is true, but I must also say that I dislike this terminology, which from a certain point of view delimits the problem since it seems that we must now debate about institutions instead of the Word of God, as though we had to place our institutions in the centre and fight for them. I think that in this way the ecclesiological issue as well as that of the "Ministerium" are not dealt with correctly. The real question is the presence of the Word in the world. In the second century the early Church primarily took a threefold decision: first, to establish the canon, thereby stressing the sovereignty of the Word and explaining that not only is the Old Testament "*hai graphai*", but together with the New Testament constitutes a single Scripture which

is thus for us the master text. However, at the same time the Church has formulated an Apostolic Succession, the episcopal ministry, in the awareness that the Word and the witness go together; that is, the Word is alive and present only thanks to the witness, so to speak, and receives from the witness its interpretation. But the witness is only such if he or she witnesses to the Word. Third and last, the Church has added the *"regula fidei"* as a key for interpretation. I believe that this reciprocal compenetration constitutes an object of dissent between us, even though we are certainly united on fundamental things. Therefore, when we speak of ecclesiology and of ministry we must preferably speak in this combination of Word, witness and rule of faith, and consider it as an ecclesiological matter, and therefore together as a question of the Word of God, of his sovereignty and humility inasmuch as the Lord entrusts his Word, and concedes its interpretation, to witnesses which, however, must always be compared to the *"regula fidei"* and the integrity of the Word. Excuse me if I have expressed a personal opinion; it seemed right to do so. Another urgent priority in ecumenical dialogue arises from the great ethical questions of our time; in this area, contemporary man, who is searching, rightly expects a common response on the part of Christians, which, thanks be to God, in many cases has been forthcoming. There are so many common declarations by the German Bishops' Conference and the Evangelical Churches in Germany that we can be grateful for, but unfortunately, this does not always happen. Because of contradictory positions in this area our witness to the Gospel and the ethical guidance which we owe to the faithful and to society lose their impact and often appear too vague, with the result that we fail in our duty to provide the witness that is needed in our time. Our divisions are contrary to the will of Jesus and they disappoint peoples' expectations. I think that we must work with new energy and dedication to bring a common witness into the context of these great ethical challenges of our time. We all know there are numerous models of unity and you know that the Catholic Church also has as her goal the full visible unity of the disciples of Christ, as defined by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in its various Documents (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 8, 13; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nn. 2, 4, etc.). This unity, we are convinced, indeed subsists in the Catholic Church, without the possibility of ever being lost (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 4); the Church in fact has not totally disappeared from the world. On the other hand, this unity does not mean what could be called ecumenism of the return: that is, to deny and to reject one's own faith history. Absolutely not! It does not mean uniformity in all expressions of theology and spirituality, in liturgical forms and in discipline. Unity in multiplicity, and multiplicity in unity: in my [Homily for the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul on 29 June last](#), I insisted that full unity and true catholicity in the original sense of the word go together. As a necessary condition for the achievement of this coexistence, the commitment to unity must be constantly purified and renewed; it must constantly grow and mature. To this end, dialogue has its own contribution to make. More than an exchange of thoughts, an academic exercise, it is an exchange of gifts (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 28), in which the Churches and the Ecclesial Communities can make available their own riches (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 8, 15; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nn. 3, 14ff.; *Ut Unum Sint*, nn. 10-14). As a result of this commitment, the journey can move forward, step by step, as the Letter to the Ephesians says, until at last we will all "attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4: 13). It is obvious that this

dialogue can develop only in a context of sincere and committed spirituality. We cannot "bring about" unity by our powers alone. We can only obtain unity as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, spiritual ecumenism - prayer, conversion and the sanctification of life - constitutes the heart of the meeting and of the ecumenical movement (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 8; *Ut Unum Sint*, 15ff., 21, etc.). It could be said that the best form of ecumenism consists in living in accordance with the Gospel. I would also like in this context to remember the great pioneer of unity, Bro. Roger Schutz, who was so tragically snatched from life. I had known him personally for a long time and had a cordial friendship with him. He often came to visit me and, as I already said in Rome on the day of his assassination, I received a letter from him that moved my heart, because in it he underlined his adherence to my path and announced to me that he wanted to come and see me. He is now visiting us and speaking to us from on high. I think that we must listen to him, from within we must listen to his spiritually-lived ecumenism and allow ourselves to be led by his witness towards an interiorized and spiritualized ecumenism. I see good reason in this context for optimism in the fact that today a kind of "network" of spiritual links is developing between Catholics and Christians from the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities: each individual commits himself to prayer, to the examination of his own life, to the purification of memory, to the openness of charity. The father of spiritual ecumenism, Paul Couturier, spoke in this regard of an "invisible cloister" which unites within its walls those souls inflamed with love for Christ and his Church. I am convinced that if more and more people unite themselves interiorly to the Lord's prayer "that all may be one" (Jn 17: 21), then this prayer, made in the Name of Jesus, will not go unheard (cf. Jn 14: 13; 15: 7, 16, etc.). With the help that comes from on high, we will also find practical solutions to the different questions which remain open, and in the end our desire for unity will come to fulfilment, whenever and however the Lord wills. Now let us all go along this path in the awareness that walking together is a form of unity. Let us thank God for this and pray that he will continue to guide us all.