



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL CASSIDY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PLENARY SESSION
OF THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

To my Venerable Brother

Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy

President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

"*Love never ends*" (1 Cor 13:8). The Apostle Paul's clear and convinced affirmation encourages and sustains the Catholic Church's commitment in her relations with the Orthodox Churches, and also offers a basic orientation for the theological dialogue.

Unfortunately, because of the war in the Balkans, it was not possible to hold the desired plenary session of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church scheduled for June in Baltimore. With deep regret it was jointly decided to postpone the meeting until next year; such an important moment of dialogue, in fact, must be able to rely on the presence of all those concerned and to take place in the right climate for creating the conditions necessary for calmly seeking the Truth.

If, on the one hand, the postponement of the Commission's plenary session has emphasized that historical events can also have an impact on the theological dialogue, on the other, this is an incentive to strengthen our determination to continue the journey in obedience to the Lord's will and relying on the constant help of the Holy Spirit.

Now on the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian era, the ecumenical commitment must be animated by renewed and ardent vigour. Anyone who sets his hand to this task is called to work resolutely for its fulfilment and not to halt in the face of difficulties.

In more recent years, the dialogue between members of the Joint Commission has examined a difficult question stemming from historical events and divisions that occurred in the second Christian millennium.

Venerable Brother, I would like to encourage you and the members of the Commission to reflect with painstaking sensitivity and understanding on the existing relations between the Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Catholic Churches, aware that, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, the latter have equal dignity with the other Churches in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, they enjoy the same rights and are bound by the same obligations (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 3).

This very delicate phase of dialogue must be concluded by striving to seek with patience, a fraternal spirit and love for the truth a common understanding which will enable the Commission to resume its original theological programme. Not only should the dialogue not be interrupted, but it must continue with renewed intensity so that the witness of Christ's followers will shine more brightly in the contemporary world on the threshold of the new millennium.

I therefore urge this Pontifical Council to seek the ways and means to make relations with each of the Orthodox Churches as cordial and constructive as possible, and to create the conditions that will enable the theological dialogue to draw the ecclesiological and canonical consequences which derive from the sacramental structure of the Church.

I hope that this effort will gradually lead to overcoming the existing difficulties and will help Christ's disciples advance resolutely towards full communion.

In entrusting my wishes to you as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I would once again like to express the Holy See's firm will to continue the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue in charity and in truth. May the Holy Spirit enlighten and guide our way and nourish the hope that is based on the Lord's own prayer for his disciples: "*Ut unum sint*".

As I call upon the motherly intercession of the *Theotokos* to sustain the work undertaken, I gladly give you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 20 May 1999.

JOHN PAUL II