



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL JAMES FRANCIS STAFFORD
ON THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal James Francis Stafford
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

1. Four years have now gone by since that memorable 24 January 1997, when I had the occasion to meet the initiators of the Neocatechumenal Way and, with them, the numerous persons in charge of the community of the Way throughout the world. On that occasion, joining myself to their prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for the precious fruits brought by the Way in 30 years of life, I did not fail to emphasize the importance of some unavoidable obligations on which the very existence of the Way depends. Among these, the drafting of precise statutes in view of its formal juridical acknowledgement (cf. *To the Neocatechumenal Way*, 24 January 1997, n. 6; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 5 February 1997, p. 9). Thus a new stage was begun which was decisive for the future of this ecclesial reality.

2. Already in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988) I recalled that "no charism dispenses a person from reference and submission to the *Pastors of the Church*" (n. 24), and I referred to what is written in this regard in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*: "Judgement as to their (charisms) genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church, and to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good (cf. 1 Thes 5: 12; 19-21)" (n. 12). It is on this condition, in fact, that charisms, in their diversity and complementarity, can work together for the common good (cf. *Christifideles laici*, n. 24).

This process of recognition and acceptance of charisms is therefore not an easy one. It requires a profound discernment of the will of God and must be accompanied by constant prayer, so that hearts may be readily opened to the voice of the Spirit in ecclesial communion. The climax of this process is the official act of recognition and approval of the statutes as a clear and sure rule of life,

an occasion that the ecclesial communities concerned always live with great joy and sincere gratitude to God and to the Church. The new point of departure is in fact a visible sign of a mature ecclesial identity (cf. *Christifideles laici*, n. 30).

3. I know with how much zeal and pastoral care the Pontifical Council for the Laity strives to accompany the Neocatechumenal Way in this crucial stage of its life: the preparation of the statutes. I entrusted this delicate task, your Eminence, to this Pontifical Council for the Laity, because of the authority which it holds, on the basis of current canonical regulations, in addition to the special experience that it has in this field. Herein lies the hope of a successful outcome of the procedure, by now heading towards its concluding phase.

While I express to the Pontifical Council for the Laity my sincere appreciation and my gratitude for the seriousness and rigour adopted in the task assigned to them, I confirm its expertise in the approval of the statutes, once they are duly drafted, and I also charge them to continue accompanying the Way in the future. I am sure that in fulfilling this mandate the Pontifical Council for the Laity will be able to count on the cooperation and the spirit of filial docility of the Neocatechumenal Way.

In entrusting to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, the activity of the council over which you preside, I sincerely impart to you, venerable Brother, as also to your assistants, my affectionate Blessing.

From the Vatican, 5 April 2001.

JOHN PAUL II