



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO,
SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ECUMENICAL MEETING

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

*Anglican Cathedral of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
Monday, 12 September 1988*

1. “*How good and how pleasant it is, brothers dwelling in unity... For there the Lord gives his blessing, life for ever*” (Ps. 133 (132), 1. 3).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

these words of the Psalmist express a basic longing of the human heart, the longing for harmony and friendship with others. At the same time, they express the longings of all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus. In fact, the desire for unity among Christians has been *gaining momentum* in a significant way in the course of this century, and especially since the calling of the Second Vatican Council by my predecessor Pope John XXIII.

With gratitude to God for this *movement towards complete unity in faith and charity* which *the Holy Spirit is sustaining* in our lifetime, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to meet you today, you who are the representatives of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities in Zimbabwe. I thank you for the cordial welcome which you have extended to me, and I am grateful for the commitment each of you has made to the ecumenical movement.

2. In my first Encyclical Letter, at the very beginning of my pastoral service of the Church as the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I expressed my own great desire to continue and intensify the Catholic Church’s many efforts at restoring the fullness of unity among Christ’s followers, a unity that will only be advanced by keeping *a steady focus on the face of Christ*. I wrote: “in Christ and

through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence. All of us who are Christ's followers must therefore meet and unite around him. This unity in the various fields of the life, tradition, structures and discipline of the individual Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities cannot be brought about without effective work aimed at getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way to perfect unity" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 11).

This meeting today is certainly one more step in the necessary enterprise of "getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way". But even more important than getting to know each other is that we get *to know and accept more profoundly our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* and the fullness of his teaching. That is why daily prayer and meditation on the Gospels are essential for the beginning and continuity of any ecumenical initiative.

In prayer, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and moves our hearts, thus deepening our communion with the Most Holy Trinity. And in our *meditation on the Gospels* we see ever more clearly the mercy of God who in Christ the Redeemer has reconciled the world to himself and handed on to us in the Church the work of reconciliation.

3. *Christ's own prayer* to the Father reveals to us his great desire for the unity of all his followers: "May they all be one", he prays, "Father, may they be *one in us, as you are in me and I am in you*" (Io. 17, 21).

The unity for which our Saviour prays is really *a communion in truth and love*, a communion like that which exists between the Father and the Son. There is nothing superficial, then, about the unity for which Christ prayed, a unity for which he would lay down his life, the unity for which the Church continually strives. And this unity is closely linked to the new life of faith in Christ which each of us received in *the Sacrament of Baptism*.

From the moment we were freed from sin through this sacrament and filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, *we began to experience*, to some extent, *the communion for which Christ prayed*: "Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you" (*Ibid.* 17, 21). It is a communion with the Holy Trinity, and a communion with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

4. But this wonderful gift of communion, rooted in "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*Eph.* 4, 5) has been *damaged by sins of division*. Contrasting positions on doctrine and diverging paths, together with many failures in charity, have sown discord among those baptized "in water and the Holy Spirit" (*Io.* 3, 5). As a most regrettable consequence, non-believers are often scandalized at the absence of love which has grown up among the followers of Christ. And this, in turn, has greatly hindered the primary mission of the Church which is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to the very ends of the earth.

But *the power of sin and division* has not had the final word. Instead it has been *conquered by Christ* through his own Sacrifice on the Cross. And the Spirit of Truth and Love has never stopped working in the Church to overcome the hatred and division, the centuries of misunderstanding and discord. In the past thirty years, in particular, the *Holy Spirit* has prompted within the hearts of believers *remorse over mistakes of the past, a new desire to overcome divisions, a fresh enthusiasm for working together* as brothers and sisters in the vineyard of the Lord.

5. I know that *here in Zimbabwe* numerous initiatives have been undertaken in this regard, initiatives which have been aided by the *traditional African appreciation* of the great value of *community life and the family*. You, like Christians throughout the world, are now walking together along the path that will lead to fullness of communion in Christ.

Your many *joint activities in the field* of human development, as well as the *ecumenical dialogues*, are commendable projects and serve as a good foundation for further ecumenical collaboration. I think, too, of your fraternal cooperation in meeting the needs of migrants, refugees and victims of natural disaster. There is also your mutual concern for the work of justice and peace and for a more equitable distribution of natural resources.

In all these joint efforts, what we strive to show to the world are both *the human dimension and the divine dimension* of the great *mystery of the Redemption*. As I wrote in my first Encyclical, “we can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with unwearying perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ, namely the dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*).

6. The words of the Psalmist remind us of a primary element of the ecumenical movement: *constant prayer for complete unity in Christ and praise of his Holy Name*. As the Psalmist says: “*I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise always on my lips... Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name*” (Ps. 34(33), 2. 3-4).

Although common worship may not be possible in many cases, nevertheless prayer services such as this one today play an important part in helping to restore unity among the followers of Jesus. The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is one initiative in this regard which deserves special commendation and support. And in our own Communion, we have an obligation to *follow the example of Christ* in praying: “May they all be one” (Jo. 17, 21).

Above all, we must *never lose confidence* in what the Spirit of God can accomplish in our own day. For as the Angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary, “*nothing is impossible to God*” (Luc. 1, 37). Let our hearts then be alive with faith and always steadfast in hope. And may the praise of God be always on our lips: “Glorify the Lord with me. *Together let us praise his name*” (Ps. 34(33),

4). Amen.

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