



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF
THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY***

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 18 November 2010

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It gives me great joy to meet you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, during which you are reflecting on the theme: “Towards a new stage in the ecumenical dialogue”, In addressing my cordial greeting to each one of you, I also wish to thank in particular your President, Archbishop Kurt Koch for his warm words expressing your sentiments.

Yesterday, as Archbishop Koch mentioned, you celebrated with a solemn commemorative Act the 50th anniversary of your Dicastery. On 5 June 1960, on the eve of the [Second Vatican Council](#) which identified ecumenical commitment as central for the Church, Bl. [John XXIII](#) created the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity which in 1988 was given the name of “Pontifical Council”. This Act was a milestone on the ecumenical journey of the Catholic Church. In the course of 50 years great headway has been made.

I would like to express deep gratitude to all those who have devoted their service to the Pontifical Council, recalling first of all the successive Presidents: Cardinal Agostino Bea, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy; and I am particularly pleased to thank Cardinal Walter Kasper, who has led the Dicastery in the past 11 years with competence and enthusiasm. I thank the members and consultants, officials and collaborators, those who have contributed to bringing about the theological dialogues and ecumenical meetings and all those who have prayed the Lord

for the gift of visible unity among Christians.

These are 50 years in which a true knowledge and greater esteem has been acquired with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities, overcoming prejudices crystallized by history: we have grown in theological dialogue and in the dialogue of charity; various forms of collaboration have developed, among which, in addition to those for defending life, for safeguarding creation and for combating injustice, collaboration in the field of ecumenical translations of Sacred Scripture has been important and fruitful.

In recent years, then, the Pontifical Council has been involved, among other things in an extensive project, called the Harvest Project, in order to draw up a first estimate of the goals achieved in the theological dialogues with the principal Ecclesial Communities since the Second Vatican Council.

This is valuable work that has highlighted both the areas of convergence and those in which it is necessary to continue to deepen reflection.

As I thank God for the fruits already gathered, I encourage you to persevere in your commitment to promoting a correct assessment of the results achieved and to make known exactly the present state of the theological research at the service of the journey towards unity. Today some people think that this journey, especially in the West, has lost its impetus; therefore the urgent need to revive ecumenical interest and to give fresh purpose to the dialogues is felt.

Moreover we are presented with unheard of challenges: the new anthropological and ethical interpretations, the ecumenical formation of the new generations and the further fragmentation of the ecumenical scene. It is essential to become aware of these changes and to identify ways to proceed effectively in the light of the Lord's desire: "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Also with the Orthodox Churches and the Ancient Churches of the East, the "closest intimacy" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 15). The Catholic Church is eagerly continuing the dialogue, seeking seriously and rigorously to deepen the common theological, liturgical and spiritual patrimony in order to face with serenity and commitment the elements that still divide us. With the Orthodox she has reached a crucial point in comparison and reflection: the role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church's communion. And the ecclesiological issue is also the centre of the dialogue with the Ancient Churches of the East: despite many centuries of misunderstanding and distance, it is joyfully noted that a precious common patrimony has been preserved.

Dear friends, even in the presence of problematic situations or difficult points for the dialogue, the goal of the ecumenical journey remains unchanged, as does the firm commitment to pursue it. However, it is not a commitment in accordance with political categories, so to speak, in which comes into play the ability to negotiate or the greatest skill in finding compromises through which we as good mediators might expect, after a certain time, to reach agreements acceptable to all.

Ecumenical action has a dual movement.

On the one hand there is the convinced, passionate and tenacious search to find full unity in truth, to conceive of models of unity, to throw light on disagreement and obscure points in order to attain unity. And this takes place in the necessary theological dialogue but especially in prayer and penance, in that spiritual ecumenism which constitutes the vibrant heart of the whole journey: the unity of Christians is and remains prayer, it dwells in prayer.

On the other hand, there is another active movement that stems from the firm awareness that we do not know the time of the fulfillment of unity between all Christ's disciples and we cannot know it, because it is not "we who can decide it", God "decides" it. It comes from on high from the unity of the Father with the Son in the dialogue of love which is the Holy Spirit; it is a participation in the divine unity. And this must not diminish our commitment; indeed it must make us ever more attentive to understanding the signs and times of the Lord, knowing and recognizing with gratitude what already unites us and working to consolidate and increase it. In the end, also on the ecumenical journey it is a question of leaving to God what is *his* alone and of exploring, with seriousness, constancy and dedication, what is *our duty*, bearing in mind that the binomials of acting *and* suffering, of activity *and* patience, of effort *and* joy are part of our commitment.

Let us trustingly invoke the Holy Spirit so that he may guide us on our journey and that everyone may feel with fresh vigour the call to work for the ecumenical cause. I encourage all of you to continue in your work; it is help that you offer the Bishop of Rome in the fulfillment of his mission at the service of unity. As a sign of affection and gratitude, I warmly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

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