



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE
GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA**

Wednesday, 17 January 1979

Dear young people,

A great joy is renewed for me this morning as I bid you a hearty welcome to this Vatican Basilica. I thank you sincerely for the stupendous sight that your joyful presence offers to my eyes at this moment. Your faces, as clear as springs and as intense as flames, represent in the ecclesial community those ideal forms of Christian life. For this reason the Church, in her permanent spiritual youth, cannot but recognize herself in you, who are in the season of life which, in some ways, is the most beautiful one.

Among you there is also a particularly large group of students from the Pontifical School Pius IX. Together with their superiors, the hard-working Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy, and with the members of their families, they have come on a pilgrimage to manifest to the Pope their serious commitment of spiritual and cultural formation in the wake of their luminous tradition. This, from 1859, that is, since the Servant of God Pius IX, my venerated predecessor, set up your Institute, counts generations of young people who have been moulded to the high ideals of faith and science. Beloved sons, emulate and be proud of the examples set you by those who have preceded you, and, above all, be courageous witnesses to the Gospel in modern society.

And now let us make some short reflections together on the "Week of prayer for Christian unity", which will begin in the whole world tomorrow, to ask the Lord for the grace of the recomposition of the unity of all Christian Churches and to arrive at last at one fold under one Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:16).

In this week our prayer for unity, which has been defined "the soul of the whole ecumenical

movement" (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8), must be continual and fervent, both to thank the Lord, who has aroused the desire for unity among all Christians, and to beseech further enlightenment in the continual search to rediscover what we have in common with our separated brethren and what has still to be overcome to reach the perfect unity, so much desired by the Lord in his prayer to the Father: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21).

In obedience to this will of Christ, the Catholic Church has established brotherly relations with the other Christian Churches and confessions. In this connection, I wish to inform you that a theological dialogue is about to open between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition in order to eliminate those difficulties which still prevent eucharistic concelebration.

Dialogues have been going on for some time also with our separated Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed brothers, and I am happy to tell you that on subjects which, in the past, constituted deep divergences, consoling meeting points have been arrived at. Friendly and useful relations have also been established with the World Council of Churches and with other interconfessional organizations. There is still a long way to go, however: we must therefore quicken our pace in order to reach the coveted goal.

Let us renew, therefore, our prayer to the Lord, so that he may give all Christians light and strength to do everything possible to obtain, as soon as possible, full unity in charity and in truth, so that "speaking the truth"—as the Apostle of the Gentiles says—"we (shall) grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

Let us seek to live this Week for unity in this spirit of full ecclesial fellowship, adapting ourselves to the biblical subject which inspires the ecumenical celebrations this year: "be in one another's service for the glory of God" (cf. 1 Pt 5:7-11). This subject calls us to live together as much as possible the common heritage of all Christians. Cooperation, mutual love, reciprocal service make us get to know one another better and spur us also to find ways to overcome divergences.

For this purpose let us prepare our minds for prayer and now recite together the *Our Father* ...

In the firm confidence that you will continue to pray for the great cause of unity during this week, I willingly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I wish to extend to your companions and members of your family who were unable to take part in this audience.

