



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SECRETARIAT
FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY**

Friday, 16 November 1984

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

it is a particular pleasure to welcome you today, members, consultors and staff of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It is a pleasure because I am able to greet a number of new members, diocesan Bishops from different parts of the world who gladly come here in the exercise of their collegial responsibilities to assist the Holy See in its universal of unity. It is a pleasure because my meeting with you occurs within a few days of the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation by the Second Vatican Council of its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and its Decree on Ecumenism, foundation documents that are, so to speak, the Magna Charta of your particular service of the Church. And it is a pleasure because during this week you are examining the ecumenical dimensions of the new Code of Canon Law.

In the Apostolic Constitution the new Code, "*Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*", I spoke of it as "a great effort to translate... conciliar ecclesiological teaching into canonical terms" and as "a complement to the authentic teaching proposed by the Second Vatican Council". In listing the elements which characterize the true and genuine image of the Church, I was careful to make mention of "the Church's commitment to ecumenism".

One canon is of particular importance in this respect. Echoing a fundamental concern of "*Unitatis Redintegratio*" it states without ambiguity: "It pertains especially to the entire College of Bishops and to the Apostolic See to foster and direct among Catholics the ecumenical movement, the purpose of which is the restoration of unity (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) between all Christians, which by the will of Christ the Church is bound to promote" (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, [can. 755](#), § 1).

The promulgation of the Code, a work so carefully prepared and discussed over many years, is an example of the way in which our fidelity to the Gospel and to the mystery of the Church must lead us on from words to deeds. Inevitably the Code is brief and succinct, but in its application to pastoral life it is intended to be "an effective instrument by the help of which the Church will be able to perfect herself in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*). It has been your task in these days to reflect further on the many ways in which the ecumenical implications of this "law of the Council" can and must find practical expression in the daily life of the Church.

A few months ago we had a striking example of this. During the *visit of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I* was last June, we were happy to sign a Common Declaration. In this we were able, as a result of a long and careful dialogue, to profess one faith in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. But also we went on to give practical expression to this common faith by authorizing close pastoral collaboration between our Churches, and also the administration of the Sacraments to those members of either Church who have no access to their own priests. This is not yet the full communion for which we ardently long, but already it gives fuller expression in deeds to that growing communion which already exists between us.

But, as this example shows, words can lead to deeds only to the extent that we are truly one in the faith we profess. It is for this reason that such importance attaches to the many dialogues to which the Catholic Church is now committed through the work of your Secretariat and its generous collaborators. These dialogues are too many to list in this short address, but I must state my satisfaction that an official dialogue has now commenced with the World Baptist Alliance.

The main topics in our dialogue of faith with the Orthodox Churches relate to the mystery of the Church and the Sacraments. Because of the progress of this dialogue I was particularly happy during my visit to Switzerland earlier this year to visit the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Chambésy. My visit was necessarily brief, but in the warm welcome I received there I was able to re-live something of the experience of my visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate five years ago, an experience which is renewed and fostered in the annual exchanges of visits between Rome and Constantinople on the feast days of the holy Apostles, our patrons.

It is particularly encouraging to see that many other dialogues have also now arrived, each in its own way, at a point at which their chief topic is the mystery of the Church herself; thus the doctrine that lay at the heart of the Council's teaching is today at the heart of the ecumenical dialogue. This is true, for example, of the new phase of the dialogue with the Anglican Communion, which has made a good beginning even while the Final Report of the earlier Commission is the object of prolonged study and evaluation according to the respective procedures of our two Communion.

As you know, during my visit to Switzerland I had a meeting of outstanding importance at the Ecumenical Centre of the World Council of Churches, and there, in a climate of prayer, I was able

to speak once more of the commitment of the Catholic Church to the work for unity. I was likewise able to speak with the staff of the various practical steps in which our growing collaboration is increasingly finding expression, whether in the field of the multilateral theological dialogue or in the realms of cooperation to meet the countless needs of a sorely divided humanity. Such a meeting, like the many ecumenical meetings which are an important part of my apostolic journeys, was indeed an encouragement and a joy.

Thus our words are beginning to find translation into deeds. Our dialogues and other contacts are meant to lead, in truth and love, to profound changes of relationships with our fellow Christians, and I thank God that through his grace such changes are now beginning to become manifest. But we must not be too complacent about this; such a change of relationships must not be confined to a simple matter of mutual courtesies that takes no account of serious difficulties still to be faced. It must lead us to that collaboration which enables us with one heart and one voice to proclaim the Word of God, a collaboration which we hope will, as it progresses, lead us to that fullness of communion in faith and charity which is God's will and for which we long.

For this reason we who are Bishops have a grave responsibility to promote the will for unity among the people who are entrusted to our care. The careful and sensitive implementation of the new Code of Canon Law, with its constant emphasis upon the importance of ecclesial communion, must be a primary means of intensifying that "spirit of the Council" which should characterize Catholics everywhere. In your collaboration with the Apostolic See through your work in the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and in your work as pastors in your own dioceses and as members of your Episcopal Conferences, I urge you to carry on this great work with courage and fidelity, for these are real elements of true pastoral prudence. Saint Paul says to all, not only "be watchful", but also "stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong". "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor. 16, 13-14). As the canon I have quoted already says "It is a matter likewise for Bishops and, in accordance with the law, for Episcopal Conferences, to promote this same unity and, in line with the various needs and opportunities of the circumstances, to issue practical norms which accord with the provisions laid down by the supreme authority of the Church" (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, [can. 755](#), § 2).

As we recall once more the twentieth anniversary of the Council's Decree on Ecumenism, a decree which means even more to us after the rich experience of twenty years of these new relations with our fellow Christians, a decree which challenges us constantly to new and ever more vigorous action at every level of the Church's life, I thank you again for being present at this plenary meeting. I ask the God of unity to bless you and everyone who collaborates with you and with the Secretariat in working for the restoration of unity between all Christians - a task "which, by the will of Christ, the Church is bound to promote" (*Ibid.* [can. 755](#), § 1).

And may Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word of God, assist you in directing all your activities to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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