



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

ECUMENICAL MEETING AT AKERSHUS CASTLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Christian IV's Hall, Oslo
Thursday, 1st June 1989*

*Dear Bishop Aarflot,
Dear Friends,*

1. On this joyful occasion my heart is filled with *thanks and praise to Almighty God*, who has brought us together in the name of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

I have come to Norway first of all to visit my Catholic brothers and sisters, so that I might support and strengthen them in their faith, as Jesus prayed that Peter would do for his brethren (Cfr. *Luc. 22, 32*). But *I have also come in a fraternal spirit of respect and love to greet all Christians*, who by faith and Baptism have been reborn to new life. I come here as a *brother in Christ*, in Norway, for your presence here, concrete sign to all people of God's boundless love.

I therefore wish to thank all of you, *the representatives of the Lutheran Church and of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities* in Norway, for your presence here. I am especially grateful to you, *Bishop Aarflot*, for your gracious words of welcome this evening, and in a particular way for your kind letter of last year, in which you told me that the Pope's visit to Norway was awaited with joy and expectation. As one of the ecumenical observers at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1985 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, you helped to prepare the report which the observers submitted to the Synod. It reads in

part: “We want to thank you for the confidence you place in our churches. You have not seen us as outsiders or rivals, and we have not felt ourselves to be so. You have received us as brothers in Christ through faith and baptism, though not yet in perfect communion” (“Information Service”, SPCU, 60, p. 20). Today, in Norway, I too can say that I have been received *no longer as an outsider or a rival*, but as a brother in Christ, and for this I rejoice greatly.

2. Our desire to draw closer to one another is strengthened by the fact that *Protestants and Catholics in Norway share a common heritage*. The Gospel was brought here centuries ago, long before the events of the sixteenth century. The one Church flourished in this land, nourished by the witness of committed Christians like the great martyr *Saint Olav*, to whom both Catholics and Protestants now look as a source of inspiration. This early history is in *striking contrast with the period following the Reformation*, when for more than four hundred years, in the midst of bitterness and suspicion, divided Christians closed their doors to one another. For all these centuries we co-existed in separation. Even so, a certain communion, however imperfect, remained (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3).

The common heritage of Protestants and Catholics in Norway – their common roots – is all the more important today, when the *ecumenical movement creates new possibilities and a new hope* that unity can one day be restored to the followers of Christ. As the Second Vatican Council stated: “The Lord of the Ages... has begun to bestow more abundantly upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a desire for unity” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). *Today with God’s grace we seek no less than that fullness of unity among Christians which Christ willed for his one and only Church*.

3. *The restoration of communion in this full unity which we seek calls for a common commitment to the ecumenical task*. I cannot emphasize enough how deeply this commitment has become *an irrevocable part of the Catholic Church’s life*. The Second Vatican Council set the direction in its historic decree on ecumenism in 1964. Our revised Code of Canon Law has sought to implement the conciliar teaching, affirming once again that “by the will of Christ” the Church is bound to promote the restoration of unity between all Christians (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, [can. 755. § 1](#)). It also makes clear the bishop’s duty to promote ecumenism and to treat with kindness and charity those who are not in full communion with us (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, [can. 383. § 3](#)). The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 observed that “ecumenism has inscribed itself deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the Church” (Synodi Extr. Episc. 1985, *Relatio Finalis*, II, C, 7).

I am aware that among Christians there are various interpretations of the meaning and scope of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, even when that ministry is a service to unity. Personally I would fail gravely in *my duty as Successor of the Apostle Peter* if I did not seek *constantly and energetically to promote Christian unity*. I do so in obedience to the will of Christ for unity among his disciples and in response to the grace of the Holy Spirit which is at work in fostering that unity in our day (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

For her part, *the Lutheran Church of Norway has likewise made significant contributions* to the ecumenical movement. Special honour must be paid to the memory of Bishop Berggrav and Professor Einer Moland, two great champions of ecumenism. More recently – at Stavanger in 1985 – the Lutheran Church of Norway hosted the Plenary Meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order. This was not only an expression of generous hospitality, but also evidence of a growing awareness that, although the Christian faith takes root in individual cultures, it also transcends every distinction of race and nation.

4. *The commitment to ecumenism is also a commitment to prayer and dialogue.* In charity, trust and fraternal frankness, without glossing over our important differences, we seek through prayerful dialogue to attain fullness of communion. In doing so we learn to appreciate each other's diversity and unique experiences of Christian life. We seek to arrive at a fullness of love and truth: in the words of Saint Paul, "*speaking the truth in love*" (Eph. 4, 15). Only in this way can theological dialogue bear lasting fruit.

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, in his farewell discourse to the delegated observers, Pope Paul VI said that *as a result of the Council we began once again to love each other* in accordance with Christ's words: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Io. 13, 35; cf. Pauli VI *Allocutio in Basilica S. Pauli extra Moenia*, die 4 dec. 1965). But *the fullness of love that we seek in dialogue also implies fullness of truth*: "For their sake I consecrate myself, Jesus says", "that they also may be consecrated *in truth*" (Io. 17, 19). Unity in love should lead us to *unity in faith*, unity in the truth of Christ.

Dialogue about the full truth of faith is fundamental to the question of our sharing together in the Eucharist. Catholics firmly believe that *the celebration of the Eucharist is the supreme expression of the Church's faith*. But when at the Liturgy the celebrant addresses the community, saying: "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith", Catholics and Protestants must acknowledge that we cannot yet proclaim a common faith in the mystery of the Eucharist and of the Church. The Catholic position on Eucharistic sharing is not meant to offend our partners in dialogue. Rather, it is an expression of our deep conviction, rooted in our doctrine and in accordance with ancient practice, *that the Eucharist is only to be shared by those in full communion with one another*.

The problem of Eucharistic sharing cannot be solved in isolation from our understanding of *the mystery of the Church and of the ministry which serves unity*. These issues are all interrelated. We look forward to the day, and we must pray and work hard to bring it about, when, *confessing together the one faith in Christ handed down from the Apostles*, we can share his Body and Blood as members once again of the same household of faith. This was meant to be from the beginning. It must be the common goal of dialogue and the object of our persevering prayer.

Dialogue also helps us to find the foundation for *common Christian witness in the world and for common action* in order to relieve the sufferings of humanity and to promote justice and peace. It

is my prayer that the Christian people of Norway, despite their divisions, will continue to be united in alleviating suffering and in promoting the authentic development of humanity as part of their common witness to the Gospel.

I am pleased to learn of the various *bilateral and multilateral dialogues taking place in Norway today*. I wish to mention in particular the dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Norway and the Catholic Church which came about through the personal initiative of Bishop Aarflot. This discussion forum is devoted to the study of documents emanating from the *International Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue Commission*, which for many years has been studying themes of great ecumenical significance for both Lutherans and Catholics. Now in its third phase, the dialogue is presently concerned with the important issues of justification, ecclesiology and sacramentality. The results of this dialogue must eventually be *evaluated officially by the authorities* which commissioned it. This is a vitally important step which the participants in the international dialogue have requested more than once.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends in Christ: in his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul urged them to be “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (for) there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (*Eph. 4, 3-6*).

This passage is now proclaimed to us: in our churches, in our teaching, in the personal prayer and reflection of Christ’s followers everywhere. *We must accept it as an ecumenical challenge as well as an affirmation of our Christian calling*. May the profound truth of Saint Paul’s words lead us to an ever greater communion of faith, to an ever deeper fullness of love and truth, so that overcoming every division we may be fully *one in Christ*.

I thank you again for your kind welcome and I pray that the good efforts you are making to serve the Lord by promoting the unity of Christians will bear abundant fruit, for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Grace and peace be with all of you. Amen*.