



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE DELEGATION OF THE ECUMENICAL

PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE Thursday, 30 June 2005 Dear Brothers, In welcoming you today for the first time after the beginning of my Pontificate, I am pleased to greet the members of the Delegation that His Holiness Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, sends each year for the Feast of the Holy Patrons of the Church of Rome. I address to you Paul's words to the Philippians: "Make my joy complete by your unanimity, possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideals.... Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil 2: 2-5). The Apostle, aware of how easy it is to succumb to the ever latent threat of conflicts and disputes, urged the young Community at Philippi to concord and unity. To the Galatians he was to indicate forcefully that the whole law finds its fullness in the one precept of *love*; and he exhorts them to proceed in accordance with the Spirit so as to avoid acts of the flesh - discord, jealousy, disagreement, division, factions, envy - and thus to obtain instead the fruit of the Spirit which is *love* (cf. Gal 5: 14-23). The happy tradition of assuring a reciprocal presence in St Peter's Basilica and in St George's Cathedral for the Feasts of Sts Peter and Paul and of St Andrew is therefore an expression of this shared desire to combat the works of the flesh that tend to divide us and live in accordance with the Spirit who fosters the growth of *charity* between us. Your visit today and the visit that the Church of Rome will reciprocate in a few months' time, witness that in Christ Jesus, faith works through love (cf. *ibid.*, 5: 6). This is the experience of the "dialogue of charity", inaugurated on the Mount of Olives by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, an experience that has proven not to have been in vain. Numerous significant gestures have been made since then. I am thinking of the abrogation of the reciprocal condemnations in 1054, of the discourses, documents and meetings promoted by the Sees of Rome and of Constantinople. These gestures have marked the way in the past decades. And how can I not recall here that in St Peter's Basilica a few months before his death, Pope John Paul II, of venerable memory, exchanged a fraternal embrace with the Ecumenical Patriarch precisely in order to give a strong spiritual sign of our communion in the Saints whom we both invoke, and to reaffirm our determined commitment never to stop working for full unity? Certainly the way ahead of us is long and will not be easy, marked at first by fear and hesitation; but it will become quicker and more knowledgeable. This journey has seen the growth of the hope for a sound "dialogue of truth" and a process of theological and historical clarification which has borne appreciable fruit. With the words of the Apostle Paul we must ask ourselves: "Have you had such remarkable experiences all to no purpose?" (Gal 3: 4). We feel the need to

join forces and to spare no efforts, to resume with new vigour the official theological dialogue that was initiated in 1980 between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches. In this regard, dear Brothers, I would like to express my sentiments of gratitude to His Holiness Bartholomew, who is doing his best to reactivate the work of the Joint International Catholic-Orthodox Commission. I would like to assure him that I am firmly determined to support and encourage this action. Theological research, which must address complex questions and identify solutions that are not reductive, is a grave commitment that we cannot evade. If it is true that the Lord appeals forcefully to his disciples to build unity in charity and in truth; if it is true that the ecumenical appeal is a pressing invitation to rebuild among all Christians the unity, in reconciliation and peace, that has been seriously damaged; if we cannot deny that division makes less effective that most holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 1), how can we shirk from the task of examining our differences clearly and with good will, facing them with the deep conviction that they should be resolved? The unity that we seek is neither absorption nor fusion but respect for the multiform fullness of the Church, which must always be, in conformity with the desire of her Founder, Jesus Christ, one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This recommendation finds full resonance in the intangible profession of faith of all Christians, the Creed worked out by the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea and Constantinople (cf. *Slavorum Apostoli*, n. 15). The Vatican Council clearly recognized the treasure that the East possesses and from which the West "has taken many things"; it recalled that the fundamental dogmas of the Christian faith were defined by the Ecumenical Councils celebrated in the East; it urged the faithful not to forget all the suffering the East had to bear to preserve its faith. The Council's teaching has inspired love and respect for the Eastern Tradition, it has encouraged people to consider the East and the West as mosaic pieces that together make up the resplendent face of the *Pantocrator*, whose hand blessed the whole *Oikoumene*. The Council went even further, saying: "It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better. In such cases, these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 17).

Perseverance in search for unity Dear Brothers, I ask you to convey my greetings to the Ecumenical Patriarch, telling him of my resolution to persevere with firm determination in the search for full unity among all Christians. Let us continue together on the path of communion and together take *new steps and make new gestures* that lead to overcoming the remaining misunderstandings and divisions, keeping in mind that "in order to restore communion and unity... one must 'impose no burden beyond what is indispensable' (Acts 15: 28)" (*ibid.*, n. 18). Heartfelt thanks to each one of you for coming from the East to pay homage to Sts Peter and Paul, whom we venerate together. May their constant protection and above all the motherly intercession of the *Theotokos* always guide our steps. "*Brothers, may the favour of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit*" (Gal 6: 18).

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