



The Holy See

PRAYER MEETING WITH AN ECUMENICAL GROUP
FROM THE NETHERLANDS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS OF JOHN PAUL II

*Urban VIII Chapel
Friday, 21 March 1986*

Dear Friends in Christ,

In our prayer today we recall a truth that is vital for our life as Christians, namely that Christ gave a commission to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you".

These words put clearly before us our true self-understanding as followers of Christ. He has entrusted to us the task of bringing people into contact with the saving mysteries of Redemption and of bearing witness to the Good News of Christ.

But with this commission given by Christ comes a challenge to Christian of every age and place. For our mission to be effective, we must ourselves bear witness to the reality of reconciliation that we preach.

That is why I believe that one of the most compelling questions of our time concerns Christian unity. Does not the present disunity of Christians undermine our ability to carry out the great commission which Christ has given to us? Do not others in the world raise questions about the credibility of Christianity when they see how we disagree with one another on important issues of faith?

But ours is an age of ecumenism. An age in which we come with a new spirit to face old problems which stand between us. As we look at the history of our separation, perhaps we can recognize

that we are all victims of events that divided us centuries ago, and still keep us apart. We are victims of a history that we did not create, but which affects us today.

The question now facing us is whether we will perpetuate these divisions which make it difficult to carry out the great commission Christ has given us. The challenge to us now is whether we can become architects of a new situation in which the divisions between us are healed at the root, so that the scandal of disunity may be consigned to the past, to history. In that situation we will be free to bear ever stronger witness to the full meaning of life in Christ.

Of course, this will not be easy. But the psalmist reminds us: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth". Christ calls us to unity. And to the great commission which he gave the disciples he also added a promise: "I am with you always, to the close of the age". In this way, he has assured us of his abiding presence among us. He has promised to share his life with us. He never abandons us.

In the steps we take in praying together, and in discussing our problems together, we collaborate with Christ in creating a new peace among those who believe in him. We contribute to the day when our witness to him can be free of the burden of disunity that casts a shadow over our efforts to preach to the world the Christ who is God's living Word and our hope for salvation.

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