



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO LEADERS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

IN GREAT BRITAIN *Friday, 29 April 1983* Dear Friends in our Lord Jesus Christ, Already nearly a year has passed since I had the pleasure of meeting some of you for an all-too brief discussion in the Deanery of Canterbury, but the memory of that day - indeed of all those days in Britain - is still fresh in my mind. Wherever I went the "ecumenical dimension" was not just some sort of additional extra; it was an integral part of the events of those days and showed clearly that, as I remarked soon after my return to Rome, "Christianity in Great Britain is an important ecumenical terrain" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio in Audientia generali*, 2, die 9 iun. 1982: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, V/2 [1982] 2153). And now, in response to the invitation I extended at that meeting at Canterbury, you have come to Rome "to build further on the foundations so happily laid" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad responsabiles Ecclesiarum christianuarum in cathedrali templo Cantuariensi habita*, 3, die 29 maii 1982: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, V/2 [1982] 1950) on that occasion. For this I thank you most sincerely; I know that you all have demanding responsibilities and that it cannot have been easy for you all to find mutually convenient dates to come here together in this way for a series of meetings with the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and with some other offices of the Roman Curia. You have prepared these meetings carefully in a series of consultations between the leaders of the British Churches gathered by the British Council of Churches and the representatives named by the two Episcopal Conferences of Great Britain to accompany you. I dare to hope that this preparatory collaboration will itself prove to have made a contribution to the growth of closer relationships between the Churches you represent and the Catholic Church in your countries. The topics that our discussions led you to propose for this week's meetings are an accurate reflection of the stage we have now reached in our common pilgrimage towards the re-establishment between us of the unity that God wills. Already through our one Baptism we are in a communion that is real, but as yet that communion between us is not full and perfect. As we attempt to bear witness together, we are expressing, and thereby strengthening, that degree of baptismal unity which God's grace already enables us to enjoy. And as we examine those other questions and problems that arise as we seek to grow together - and we feel them more sharply as we grow closer - we are humbly acknowledging that our journey is not yet over and that in our journeying we are in total need of the grace of God, a grace on which we can most surely rely, "such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God" (2 Cor. 3, 4). It is significant that the question of the Christian witness to peace should have first place on your programme, for surely this is an extremely urgent problem that faces the Church and the world today. But time does not allow me to comment on the individual topics you have been discussing. I would like to put before you a thought that is perhaps more general but yet, I am sure, very practical. Work for Christian unity has an undeniable and irreplaceable local quality, its own resources and its own initiatives in response to local circumstances. But it must at the same time look to the whole *oikoumene*; otherwise it will fall short of its true aim. For this reason the Catholic Episcopal Conferences in your own countries have the task of taking the relevant decisions in many

matters of common Christian concern and, in major matters, of doing this in consultation with the Holy See, in order to ensure and to strengthen their bonds of communion with their brother Bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, who is called to serve the unity of all. But in such matters of common concern they act also in consultation with leaders of other Communions, and I am glad to know that in the countries from which you come there are plans for closer consultations on some of the fundamental questions that face all Christians today, and on how to ensure the local progress of the ecumenical movement. All the World Christian Communions you represent are already in dialogue at international level with the Catholic Church. These dialogues may be at different stages of development, but all have the same goal, and all impose on us now the duty of collaborating as far as we can in bringing Christ and his peace to our divided world and, to this end, of abandoning ourselves completely to the truth of the Gospel (cf. *Communis "Declaratio" Summi Pontificis et Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, die 29 maii 1982: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, V/2 [1982] 1943 ss.*). In these international discussions several important studies have concentrated on the principles of Common Witness, and there is need for these to be given concrete form in response to the needs of each country, each place. In the countries from which you come the points which you have chosen for discussion here - Peace, the fundamental ideals of Christian Marriage, the task of the Christian in dialogue with other faiths - offer hope for real progress in a common work; and progress here will surely, by God's grace, reinforce our common desire for true unity and enable us, in all fidelity to him, to progress towards resolution of those fundamental ecumenical questions of which you have spoken. It is in this light that I view your present visit to Rome. As I look back on my visit to Britain last year, I am aware of how much I gained through personally experiencing something of Christian life there, not least the quality of the relations between Christians of all confessions. In much the same way I hope that your experience of these few days in Rome will contribute to a greater understanding that will lead to a closer collaboration in your own countries, a collaboration that will have its effects elsewhere too, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him" (1 *Thess.* 1, 12). You are aware that the Catholic Church is celebrating a special Jubilee Year of the Redemption, effected once for all by Jesus Christ in his death and Resurrection. You yourselves are engaged in final preparations for the Assembly at Vancouver on the theme "Jesus Christ, the Life of the World". May our one Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Life of the World, bless us all and enable us to be his worthy instruments as we seek to serve the unity of his Church and the true unity of all humanity for which he shed his precious Blood upon the Cross "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (*Col.* 1, 19). "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (*Hebr.* 13, 21). © Copyright 1983 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana