



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS AND CONSULTORS
OF THE JOINT LUTHERAN/CATHOLIC COMMISSION***

Friday, 2 March 1984

Dear Friends in Christ,

I welcome you cordially and greet you with deep respect and a keen sense of the bonds which link us together.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude. "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly keeping you in our prayers" (1 Thess 1, 2).

Our thoughts reach back to those memorable years of the Second Vatican Council. It was then, in the assembly of her pastors united with the Successor of Peter, that the Catholic Church, acting under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, decided to renew with all her strength her commitment to Christian unity. At that time our first tie was with the esteemed Delegated Observers at the Council. This soon led to official dialogue, such as we have here between the Lutheran World Federation and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. These special, official relations we see as a necessity and as a gift of God.

Now, for nearly twenty years, God's providence has led us along the paths of dialogue. During that time you yourselves, as members and consultors of the Joint Lutheran/Catholic Commission, have held ten plenary sessions and several smaller meetings. As a result you have been able to set forth important and significant elements to be used in erecting the house of unity which we are building together. With gratitude you look back upon these years of intensive work marked by a spirit of self-sacrifice. All along the way your efforts have been supported by the prayers of the Christian people and borne up by trust in the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives.

Yours has been a great responsibility, carried out with a passion for the truth which is Christ himself, with humility before the mystery of God's holy will, and with fidelity to your own heritage. In the midst of your efforts an atmosphere of close kinship has grown among you and also a spirit of solidarity with those who suffer from division; the fruits of your work are

widely known throughout the Christian world. Many people reflect upon, study and examine the common documents you have written. May your reports contribute to the movement towards Christian unity, so that this movement, led by the respective ecclesiastical authorities, will take deep roots in the hearts of all the faithful and that they in turn may be motivated to add their specific contribution.

Four years ago there took place the anniversary observance of the presentation of the Lutheran confessional document to the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. You have noted with deep satisfaction an agreement on certain central truths of faith. What unites us and what we hold in common encourages us in the hope that we shall find still further unity in those areas of faith and Christian life in which we are as yet divided.

In the commemorative year just past of Martin Luther's birth, we have been able to discern that the efforts of Evangelical and Catholic research offer us a more complete picture of the person and teaching of Luther, as well as a more adequate view of the complicated historical events of the sixteenth century. All these are important elements in the reconciliation and growing together of Catholics and Lutherans. They are landmarks on the long and arduous journey that leads us forward. We shall never cease to look for new opportunities for the step-by-step realization of that unity for which Christ prayed on the eve of his sacrificial death. Whatever is possible between us, here and now, in the way of common Christian witness - to that we wish to give life and reality.

I thank you once again for everything you have done in obedience to the will of Jesus Christ, in fidelity to the truth and in service to the Gospel in a world which is longing for light and direction. May your work be richly blessed and may it bear much fruit. I pray that the Spirit of God will give his abundant assistance to the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation this coming summer. I pray also for the future of our dialogue, so that together, in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we may "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (*2 Petr 3, 18*).

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