



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING
OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ECUMENICAL COMMISSIONS
OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES AND OF
THE SYNODS OF THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES**

Consistory Hall

Saturday, 15 May 1993 Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

*Dear Friends in Christ,*¹ It is with great joy that I greet you, at the conclusion of the Meeting of representatives of the *Ecumenical Commissions of the world's Episcopal Conferences and of the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches*. I greet, in particular, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who has called you together, and I take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the work that is being done by the Pontifical Council under his leadership. I also wish to extend a special word of welcome to the *members of other Churches and Christian Communion*s present here today. Your attendance at this meeting is most helpful for the fruitful outcome of the proceedings, and it testifies to an attitude of friendship and collaboration on your part which I acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude.² The revised *Ecumenical Directory*, which was recently approved for publication, deals extensively with the activity of the *Ecumenical Commissions*. It also speaks in detail about the *ecumenical formation* of Catholics at all levels, indicating that this must be a dimension of a complete and genuine theological and catechetical education in the Church. These are the principal themes which you have addressed in your Meeting, and they are central to the ecumenical endeavours of the Catholic Church and, indeed, to all efforts on behalf of Christian unity. The healthy development of the ecumenical movement depends greatly on a serious commitment to ecumenical formation, which in turn can be greatly helped by the efficient work of the Ecumenical Commissions. The Church's commitment to ecumenism is written into the two codes of Canon Law, where we read: "It pertains to the entire College of Bishops and to the Apostolic See to foster and direct among Catholics the ecumenical movement, the purpose of which is the restoration of unity among Christians which, by the will of Christ, the Church is bound to promote" (*Code of Canon Law*, can. [775](#); cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 902). The Bishops, in responding to this great challenge, need to be able to count on the help of experienced Ecumenical Commissions. Both at the level of the Episcopal Conference and at diocesan level, Ecumenical Commissions have the task of seeing that Church activities are imbued with a true ecumenical spirit. Commissions need to work closely with Pastoral Councils so as to ensure that dioceses, parishes and other Catholic organizations and institutions understand and explore the ecumenical implications of their activities. They should especially act to foster cooperation between Catholic bodies and their counterparts in other

Churches and Ecclesial Communities. There is already clear evidence of the way in which relations between Christians at the local level can be strengthened by the effective work of such Commissions.³ Likewise, Ecumenical Commissions have much to contribute to the ecumenical formation of both clergy and laity. In this sense, the publication of the *"Catechism of the Catholic Church"* is without doubt a precious gift to ecumenism. The *Catechism* presents the ecclesiological basis for Catholic ecumenism and recalls that the desire for rediscovering the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 820). It lists the ways in which the faithful must respond to that call, stressing especially the permanent renewal of the Church, conversion of heart on the part of all concerned, as well as prayer in common, dialogue and practical collaboration among all Christians. It is my earnest hope that the *"Catechism of the Catholic Church"* and the revised *Ecumenical Directory* will be complementary tools in the hands of those who in a particular way must carry forward the task of ecumenical formation.⁴ Another important feature of your Meeting has been the opportunity it has offered for examining the ecumenical work done in the various countries of the world and that done at the level of the universal Church. In this respect I wish to underline the importance of *making better known the fruits of the theological dialogues* in which the Catholic Church is engaged. The reports of these dialogues, as well as being important in the process of ecumenical formation, can also be a stimulus to deepening ecumenical relations at every level. *And today a stimulus is needed.* Some people have the impression that the ecumenical movement is not as vital as it was in past years. Certainly, difficulties of a practical nature on the local level are not lacking. But there may also be a certain sense of discouragement about progress in the doctrinal aspects of the dialogue. The temptation to respond to slow progress in this sphere by discounting the importance of doctrine must be altogether rejected. To lessen our passionate concern for *the truth of Christ's designs for his followers* would be to block the moving force of the Holy Spirit, *for the Spirit's task is to lead the disciples to the full truth* which the Lord has taught: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn. 16: 13). May your Meeting inspire you with fresh enthusiasm in promoting the difficult but always necessary theological dialogue, which the Council described as a "kind of 'fraternal rivalry' to incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11).⁵ The Second Vatican Council's concentration upon the theme of the Church made possible an extraordinary development of Catholic ecclesiology. This renewal in the field of ecclesiology included a new awareness of the real though imperfect communion between the Catholic Church and other Churches and Communities, and the implications of this communion for relations between us (Cf. *ibid.* 3). Ecumenical dialogue since that time has continued to identify areas of agreement regarding the nature of the Church, the doctrine and practice of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and ministry and authority within the Church. Many serious obstacles remain, but there can be no doubt that further attention to the essential elements of ecclesial communion which Christians from the different Churches and communities already share will give a new impulse to the search for unity. We must not cease, through prayer and action, to seek that full communion of faith and sacramental life, when there will be *a free and universal exchange of gifts* between all those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ. The road ahead is difficult, but we must press on towards that goal, in obedience to the will of Christ. It is therefore to him, the Risen Lord, that I prayerfully commend your work and endeavours. The level of commitment must be maintained, and in this the Ecumenical Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches have a significant part to play. Today I wish to confirm you in your ecumenical vocation and assure you of my warm support and gratitude. In the many tasks before you I commend you to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (1Cor. 16: 23). © Copyright 1993 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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