



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH***

Thursday 15 December 2005

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I welcome you in the Lord's Name and I am delighted by our fraternal meeting. In this liturgical season of the joyful expectation of the Saviour's Birth, your presence increases our joy. You revive my memories of the Churches you represent and of the whole Orthodox world.

I am also delighted by the meeting of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (as a whole)*, a sign of the desire to resume and pursue the dialogue, which in recent years has encountered serious internal and external difficulties.

This resumption of dialogue occurs subsequent to an inter-Orthodox agreement, of which His Holiness Bartholomew I informed the Catholic Church. Thus, it is especially important and constitutes a great responsibility; indeed, it is a question of doing the will of the Lord, who wants his disciples to form a harmonious community and to witness together to the brotherly love that comes from the Lord.

In this new phase of dialogue, two aspects are to be envisaged together: on the one hand, the elimination of divergences that still exist, and on the other hand, to have as it were the fundamental desire to spare no efforts to re-establish full communion, an essential good for the community of Christ's disciples, as the preparatory document for your work has stressed.

Full communion aims at a communion in truth and charity. We cannot be satisfied with remaining at intermediate stages but must ceaselessly and with courage, lucidity and humility, seek the will

of Jesus Christ, even if it does not correspond to our simple human projects.

The achievement of the full unity of the Church and reconciliation among Christians comes at the price of the submission of our own wills to the Lord's will. Such a task must involve Pastors, theologians and our entire communities, each one in accordance with his own role.

If we are to progress on this journey of unity, our own feeble forces do not suffice. We must implore the Lord for help by means of ever more insistent prayer, for unity is above all a gift of God (cf. Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 24), at the same time asking all Christians to join in common prayer because this is "certainly a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity" (*ibid.*, n. 8).

Likewise, the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* recommended reciprocal knowledge (cf. *ibid.*, n. 9) and dialogue, with which we must proceed "with love for the truth, with charity and with humility" so that doctrinal purity may be preserved (*ibid.*, n. 11). The Pastors who had the merit of embarking on this process - His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople -, in the Common Declaration with which they initiated it, began a process which it is our task to pursue to bring it to its conclusion.

By enabling us to move ahead toward full communion between Catholics and Orthodox, the dialogue will also contribute "to the multiple dialogues that are developing in the Christian world in search of its unity" (Joint Declaration, 30 November 1979; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 10 December, p. 4).

As I thank you for your commitment to study practical ways for the progress of the dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, I assure you of my fervent prayers. I also wish you a Happy and Holy Christmas. May the New Year shower divine benefits upon you and be a time of grace for the journey towards full unity.

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