



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF
THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 15 November 2012

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you all, Members and Consultors of the [Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity](#), on the occasion of your Plenary Meeting. I address my cordial greeting to each one, and in particular to the President, Cardinal Kurt Koch — whom I thank for the courteous words with which he has interpreted your common sentiments — to the Secretary and to the Co-Workers at the Dicastery, with my appreciation of their work at the service of a cause crucial to the life of the Church.

This year your Plenary Assembly focuses attention on: “The Importance of Ecumenism for the New Evangelization”. By choosing this theme you are appropriately following up what was examined at the recent Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and, in a certain sense, you wish to give a practical form, in accordance with the Dicastery’s particular outlook to the results of that meeting. Further, the reflection you are making fits very well into the context of the [Year of Faith](#) which I called for as a favourable moment to repose to all the gift of faith in the Risen Christ, during the year in which we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the [Second Vatican Council](#). As is known, the Council Fathers intended to stress the very close link that exists between the task of evangelization and overcoming the existing divisions between Christians. “Such division”, one reads at the beginning of the Decree [Unitatis Redintegratio](#),

“openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature” (n. 1). The affirmation of the conciliar Decree echoes the “priestly prayer” of Jesus when, addressing the Father, he asks that his disciples “may all be one... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). Four times in this important prayer he invokes unity for the disciples of that time and for those of the future and twice he points out that the purpose of this unity is that the world may believe, that it may “recognize” him as the One sent by the Father. There is consequently a close link between the destiny of evangelization and the Christians’ witness to unity.

An authentic ecumenical path cannot be followed without considering the faith crisis that vast regions of the planet are going through. These include those that first received the Gospel proclamation and in which Christian life flourished for centuries. Moreover the many signs that testify to the continuing need for spirituality and that are demonstrated in various ways, cannot be ignored. The spiritual poverty of many of our contemporaries, who no longer perceive the absence of God from their life as a deprivation, constitutes a challenge to all Christians. In this context, we believers in Christ are asked to return to the essential, to the heart of our faith, to bear witness together to the world to the living God, that is, to a God who knows and loves us, under whose gaze we live; of a God who expects the response of our love in everyday life. The commitment of Churches and ecclesial Communities to a renewed proclamation of the Gospel to today’s people is thus a cause of hope. Indeed, bearing witness to the living God who made himself close in Christ, is the most urgent imperative for all Christians, and it is also an imperative that unites us, in spite of the incomplete ecclesial communion that we still feel. We must not forget what unites us, namely, faith in God, Father and Creator, who revealed himself in the Son, Jesus Christ, pouring out the Spirit who gives life and sanctifies. This is the faith of Baptism that we have received, and is the faith that we can profess together in hope and charity. In the light of the priority of faith we also understand the importance of theological dialogue and conversations with the Churches and ecclesial Communities to which the Catholic Church is committed. Even when the possibility of the reestablishment of full communion cannot be glimpsed in an immediate future, they make it possible to perceive, as well as resistance and obstacles, also a wealth of experiences, of spiritual life and theological reflections that become an incentive for a witness ever more profound.

We must not, however, forget that the goal of ecumenism is the visible unity among divided Christians. This unity is not a work that we human beings can simply achieve. We must strive with all our might, but we must also recognize that, ultimately, this unity is a gift of God, it can only come from the Father through the Son, because the Church is his Church. In this perspective the importance of praying the Lord for visible unity appears but it also becomes clear that this goal is important for the New Evangelization.

Walking together towards this goal is a positive reality on condition, however, that the Churches and Ecclesial Communities do not stop along the way, accepting the contradictory differences as something normal or as the best that can be obtained. Instead it is in full communion in faith, in the

sacraments and in the ministry, that will become concretely evident the present and active power of God in the world. Through the visible unity of Jesus' disciples, humanly inexplicable, God's action that overcomes the world's tendency to disintegration.

Dear friends, I would like to express my hope that the Year of Faith will also contribute to the progress of the ecumenical journey. Unity is on the one hand a fruit of faith and, on the other, a means and almost a presupposition for proclaiming the faith ever more credibly to those who do not yet know the Lord or who, although they have received the Gospel proclamation, have almost forgotten this precious gift. True ecumenism, recognizing the primacy of divine action, demands, first of all, patience, humility, and abandonment to the Lord's will. Lastly, ecumenism and the New Evangelization both require the dynamism of conversion, understood as a sincere desire to follow Christ and to adhere fully to the Father's will. As I thank you once again, I gladly invoke upon you all the Apostolic Blessing. Many thanks.