



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO A DELEGATION FROM THE WORLD LUTHERAN FEDERATION**

*Friday 4 March, 1988*

*Dear Friends,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to the Vatican, in the course of your visit to Rome for meetings with the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and other departments of the Holy See. Your stay in Rome will no doubt include a visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, who shed their blood for Christ in this City and whose witness is part of the common heritage of all Christians. Their constancy in confessing Christ is a reminder to all the Lord's disciples of the duty to make Jesus Christ the centre and criterion of our lives.

The Second Vatican Council constitutes a fundamental point of reference for the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism. Since the time of the Council, Lutherans and Catholics have made much progress in overcoming the barriers of separation between us and in building visible bonds of unity. In theological dialogue significant work has been done in regard to matters on which we must achieve unity in faith, such as the Eucharist, ministry, and justification by faith, as also in facing other matters, including the mutual anathemas pronounced in the sixteenth century. Ways have been found to bear common witness on pressing social concerns. Such dialogue and collaboration must continue. I see the visit to Rome of the President, the General Secretary and other members of the Lutheran World Federation as a sign of your commitment to the deepening of our relationship, and for this I am very grateful.

2. In our work for unity, it is essential that our ecumenical efforts should have deep spiritual foundations. They must be, above all, Christ centred. Christ is the Saviour, the "one Mediator between God and men" (1 *Tim.* 2, 5). His Cross is our source of strength, his Resurrection our hope. As we continue building bonds of unity, we do so as co-workers with Christ. For "unless the

Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.” (Ps. 127 (126), 1).

It follows that our efforts must be directed towards conversion, an interior conversion to a deeper life in Christ, a conversion that enables us to see one another in a new light. According to the Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, conversion is that “change of heart and holiness of life” which, “along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians”, should be considered as “the soul of the whole ecumenical movement” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8).

3. Only by building our ecumenical hopes on this deeper relationship with Christ can we truly aspire to the goal of *full communion*. Because we already share bonds of unity in Christ through Baptism, we can never be satisfied with anything less than full communion. In the Catholic Church, the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 reminded us that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea” of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (SYNODI EXTR. EPISCOP. 1985 *Relatio finalis*, II C, 1), and consequently is the basis from which the Catholic Church “fully assumed her ecumenical responsibility” (SYNODI EXTR. EPISCOP. 1985 *Relatio finalis*, II C, 7) The deepening of this *biblical and ecclesial sense of communion* within our respective traditions is vital for further progress towards unity between Lutherans and Catholics. May the Holy Spirit lead us along this path!

In this Lenten season, as we look toward Easter, a passage from the First Letter of Peter is an appropriate way of acknowledging the great things that God has done for us, as we work to honour his name: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable”(1 *Petr.* 1, 3). May this be our prayer, and the conviction that sustains us!

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