

## THE POPE

## Text of Pope's Talk to World Council of Churches

Geneva, Switzerland (NC) — Here is the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's talk at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva June 12.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 1, 2).



Thank you for having invited me to visit you here in the Ecumenical Center during my visit to the Catholics of Switzerland. How fitting it is that we should meet to pray together and to talk as brothers and sisters at this season of the year when Christians throughout the world celebrate the event of Pentecost. For in the words of St. Irenaeus: "at Pentecost...the Spirit came down upon the disciples with power to grant all nations entry into life and to open the New Testament. And

so in every language they sang a hymn to God in unison. For the Spirit brought the scattered race together into unity and offered to the Father the first fruits of all the nations" (St. Irenaeus: ad hear. III, 17, 2). Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit, is for the Church the ever-living source of its unity and the beginning of its mission. Our meeting coincides with the spirit of these days.

The simple fact of my presence here among you, as bishop of Rome paying a fraternal visit to the World Council of Churches, is a sign of this will for unity. From the beginning of my ministry as bishop of Rome, I have insisted that the engagement of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement is irreversible and that the search for unity was one of its pastoral priorities. (cf. Invitation to Prayer for the Sixth Assembly of the WCC, July 24, 1983, L'Osservatore Romano of July 25, 1983). The new code of canon law as well expresses very clearly the obligation of the Catholic bishops to promote the ecumenical movement in conformity with Christ's will. (canon 755, 1).

To be sure, the Catholic Church entered on the hard ecumenical task bringing with it a conviction. Despite the moral afflictions which have marked the life of its members and even of its leaders in the course of history, it is convinced that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome it has preserved the visible pole and guarantee of unity in full fidelity to the apostolic tradition and to the faith of the fathers. St. Ignatius of Antioch in his time greeted the Church "which presides in the region of the Romans" as that "which presides in charity" over the communion. The Catholic Church believes that the bishop who presides over the life of that local Church which is made fruitful by the blood of Peter and Paul received from the Lord the mission of remaining as witness to the faith which was confessed by these two leaders of the apostolic community and which, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, brings about the unity of believers.

To be in communion with the bishop of Rome is to give visible evidence that one is in communion with all who confess that same faith, with those who have confessed it since Pentecost, and with those who will confess it until the day of the Lord shall come. That is our Catholic conviction and our fidelity to Christ forbids us to give it up. We also know that it is a difficulty for most of you, whose memories are perhaps marked by certain sorrowful recollections for which my predecessor Pope Paul VI asked your forgiveness. But we have to discuss this in all frankness and friendship, with the seriousness full of the promise shown in the work done to prepare the Faith and Order study on baptism, Eucharist and ministry. If the ecumenical movement is really led by the Holy Spirit the time for that will come.

The Catholic Church and the member Churches of the World Council of Churches have a long history in common. We share painful memories of dramatic separations and reciprocal polemics which profoundly wounded unity. It is a history in which we never ceased to have in common many of the elements and endowments which together build up and give life to the Church (cf. "The Decree on Ecumenism," n. 3). Now this history is becoming the discovery of the incomplete but real communion which exists between us. All the elements which go to make it up, or ought to do so, are progressively put in their true perspective with all the consequences that this new perception signifies for collaboration between us and for common witness.

To begin with we have become aware of our common baptism and its significance. Here the affirmations of the New Delhi or Evanston assemblies express the same conviction as the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism: "By the sacrament of baptism, whenever it is properly conferred in the way the Lord determined, and received with proper dispositions of soul, man becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ.... Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who are reborn through it." ("The Decree on Ecumenism," n. 22). Sure enough "baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ" (idem). But baptized with a true baptism, we are all enveloped in the same indivisible love of the Father, given life by the same indivisible Spirit of God, incorporated into the only Son. If we are divided among ourselves, we are all held in the same clasp by what St. Irenaeus called "the two hands of the Father" (the Son and the Spirit). That is what impels us to knit again the communion between us. It is a matter of accepting to be what we are for God in virtue of "one baptism" because of "one God and Father of us all who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4,6). Although we are still divided, we are nevertheless all in the mystery of Pentecost which is

reversing Babel. In this way our divisions stand out against the existing unity and because of it are only more scandalous.

Together we have learned to be in communion in our respect for the word of God. Thanks to the renewal of biblical studies in which the exegetes of all Christian confessions have worked side by side, some of the old polemics which have set us against each other for centuries are shown to be futile. Here we cannot but mention Cardinal Bea who consecrated to the service of unity the last 10 years of a long life dedicated to the study and teaching of Scripture. When the Second Vatican Council affirmed: "It follows that all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture" ("Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," n. 21) it was only expressing a common certitude. More and more the word of God is understood in reference to the life and witness of the ecclesial community which is animated by that Spirit of whom Jesus said: "he will teach you all things," "he will guide you into all truth" (John 14,26., 16,13). Even if we are not yet fully in accord on the interpretation of certain important points of this word of God, must we not stress the positive significance of this growing unanimity?

There is another aspect of the Christian mystery which brings us together more than in the past. Together we have learned to understand better the whole role of the Holy Spirit. Now this rediscovery, which marks the renewal of the Catholic liturgy, has made us sensitive to new dimensions of our ecclesial life. The Spirit is the source of a liberty which allows renewal in the fidelity which we receive from the generations which have gone before. He knows how to find new ways as soon as there is question of moving together towards a unity at once founded on truth and respectful of the rich diversity of really Christian values which have their source in a common patrimony (cf. Unit. Red.).

This new attention to the presence of the Spirit gives a particular accent to our prayer. To begin with, it is open to the thanksgiving in which we detach ourselves from our own cares to fix our gaze on the work of God and the marvel of his grace. This attention to God gives us a more lively awareness of God's design for his people, animated by a certitude of the primacy of the divine initiative. We can no longer be content simply to pray and intercede together. We are now anxious to bless God for the work of his grace.

Prayer holds pride of place in our concerns. Although it is not yet possible for us to celebrate the Eucharist together and communicate at the same table, more and more we set our hearts on making common prayer the center of our meetings, even when they are austere working sessions. From this point of view it is significant that last summer the assembly at Vancouver was dominated by this reality of common prayer which took place every day with dignity and fervor, and the tent where the prayer was held became the symbol of this very important ecumenical event. Today we also meet in prayer. This common growth in fidelity to the apostolic order: "Pray constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5,17-18) is the undoubted sign of the Lord's spirit in the midst of our pursuit. It shows we are on the right way.

Going forward together in the experience of prayer and thus drawing closer to each other it has become possible for us to develop what Pope Paul VI called real "fraternal solidarity" (Message to the Fifth Assembly at Nairobi, 1975) with the World Council and its member Churches. So a wide range of collaboration has developed. In the first place this is found in the serious and persevering research of the Faith and Order Commission. This is a fundamental theological work, for unity in the profession of the faith conditions the outcome of all the efforts made in common while these efforts in their turn are an important means of progressing towards this unity in the faith.

In fact a common service of humanity in the name of the Gospel is a necessary way of doing the truth and of going towards the light (cf. John 3,21). It is not by accident that the declarations of the assembly at Uppsala on the service of creation and those of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World intersect at several points. The quest of the World Council of Churches for justice and peace, its commitment to the service of the poor and the unfortunate, its incessant work for the defense of liberty and human rights means the constant care of the Catholic communities. The defense of human beings and their dignity, their liberty, their rights, the fuller meaning of their existence are a major concern of the Catholic Church. Wherever it can, it strives to make its contribution to promoting the conditions required for human development in the full truth of human existence created and redeemed by God, convinced that "man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission" (Redemptor Hominis, n. 14). By intervening in favor of human beings, whatever be the political regime of the country, it insists on making the distinction and relative autonomy of Church from state. It is respectful of the noble and difficult function of those who have charge of the common good. It undertakes a dialogue with them and enters into the stable relation of a common agreement to enable peace and justice to progress. At the same time it judges that it is not its role to intervene in the forms of government which people choose for their temporal affairs, nor to preach violence in order to change them. But it invites its lay members to take an active part in their administration and orientation according to evangelical principles and it keeps its freedom in order to judge from an ethical point of view the conditions which favor the progress of persons and of communities, or which, on the contrary, are gravely harmful to the rights of persons, to civil and religious liberty (cf. "Gaudium et Spes," n. 42, 75).

On the latter point the Catholic Church desires that other Christian Churches and communities raise their voices along with hers so that the citizens' authentic freedom of conscience and of worship be guaranteed as well as the liberty of the Churches to train their ministers and to provide them with the means they need to develop the faith of their peoples. Many persons of good will and from international organizations understand today the importance of this fundamental right. But faced with the gravity of the facts it seems to me necessary that, together, all Christians and Christian communities — when they have the possibility of expressing themselves — should give their common witness on what is vital to them.

Further we should meet together more and more in all fields where human beings, because of the burden of their environment experience great difficulties on the social, ethical or religious levels, in living according to the dignity of their vocation. So many human values — equity in relationships, authenticity of love, fraternal and generous openness to others — are obscured in the lives of individuals and of families: Despite our separations and the frequent differences in methods of operation, we often meet on the level of social thought and action and we witness to one and the same vision, based on the same reading of the Gospel. Certainly it happens that we differ about the means. Our positions on ethical questions are not always the same. But what unites us already allows us to hope that a day will come when we shall arrive at a convergence on this fundamental ground.

Yes, the will "to follow Christ" in his love for those who are in need leads us to common action. And temporary though it be, this communion in evangelical service lets us glimpse what our whole and perfect communion in faith, charity and the Eucharist could be, will be. It is not then a purely chance encounter inspired only by pity in the face of misery or a reaction in face of injustice. It belongs to our march together towards unity.

We also find ourselves together in apprehension about the future of humanity. Our faith in Christ lets us share in the same hope for facing the forces of destruction which assail the human family, erode its spiritual foundations and lead it to the brink of the abyss. The creative and redemptive work of God cannot be engulfed by all that sin kindles in the human heart, nor be definitively stopped. But that leads us to a keen perception of our own responsibility as Christians facing the future of humanity and also to awareness of the gravity of our divisions. To the extent that they obscure our witness in a world tempted by suicide they are an obstacle to the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Our communion in action is based in fact on our sharing in a common concern for evangelization. It is not simply a coincidence that you, Dr. Potter, have been invited to speak to the bishops who were meeting in Rome for the synod in 1974 and whose profound reflection on evangelization in the modern world is contained in the apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi. You outlined before the synod the way in which the World Council of Churches understands the missionary task. Already on that occasion it was apparent that the great questions for the urgency of evangelization and of its methods, of dialogue with other religions, of the relations of Gospel and culture, face all Christians and invite them to new faithfulness in mission.

Our meetings and our exchanges on this topic have shown that we are in agreement that "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" ("Evangelii Nuntiandi," n. 22). But we also recognized "that it is impossible to accept that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of problems so much discussed today concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. That would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbor who is suffering and in need." (idem, n. 31).

For the Catholic Church is the bishops who have the responsibility of orienting and coordinating all aspects of the effort of evangelization, of helping them keep their authentic inspiration, of respecting the essential freedom of the commitment of faith, and of keeping them from being degraded in proselytism or being enslaved to the ideologies of the moment. The harmonious development of a collaboration with the Catholic Church demands that this conviction about the mission of the bishop, which is also shared by several of the member Churches of the World Council, should be taken account of.

It is just 15 years since my predecessor, Pope Paul VI, came here to visit you and expressed his joy at the development of the relations between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. I want to express my wish, as I have done several times, that this collaboration between us should increase and intensify wherever possible. The joint working group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has an important task to accomplish. It must be imaginative in finding the ways which here and now allow us "to join in the great mission of revealing Christ to the world" ("Redemptor Hominis," n. 11). In doing this truth together we shall manifest this effort towards a common witness is one of the priorities assigned to the joint working group. It will call for a new effort of ecumenical formation and deepening of doctrinal understanding. Our witness cannot be truly and completely common until we reach unity in the confession of the apostolic faith.

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