



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF  
THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH***

*Friday, 21 March 1986*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

I welcome you to Rome, a city that was graced by the ministries of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

When we first met in Utrecht, you raised serious concerns that you feel very deeply. These included mixed marriages, Eucharistic sharing, the role of women in the Church, and ecumenical collaboration. I am pleased that you have come here to continue the conversation.

The issues that you have raised are of deep concern to me. These issues in fact, each in its own way, are a commentary on the age in which we live with its new ecumenical challenges. The way we deal with them will test the way we understand ecumenism. I hope that you have been able to have a good exchange on them this week. I hope that your dialogue, which has taken another step here in Rome, will continue on the national level when you return to the Netherlands.

In the brief time that we now have together, I would like to point to three basic considerations. First, we must insist again that ecumenism is a pastoral priority in the Catholic Church and for all Christian. This has been said again. All of us, on every level of the Church, must commit ourselves to seeing that the goal of visible unity is never lost sight of, and that every legitimate path towards that goal is taken.

The separations of the sixteenth century have not involved events that are only on the surface of the Church and the life of believers. They had serious consequences, separating us from each other and breaking our unity; they touched some essential elements of the faith. We have no choice but to face the wounds of division that keep us apart and to heal those wounds, so that we may live together in that fullness of faith and sacramental life which Christ would bestow on us. It is he who beckons: it falls to us to respond. This is the direction in which the ecumenical

movement has moved, for which we thank God. We feel obliged to continue in this direction in faithfulness to his mercy. This we consider a pastoral priority.

Secondly, the pastoral significance and implications of ecumenism are becoming clearer. We know that the divisions among Christians have been a scandal and an obstacle to the mission of the Church in the world. But now we see more clearly what we have also always known: that these divisions have had a negative effect on people. Human beings, individuals under our care, have suffered, have been victimized by the events of centuries ago. You have pointed this out by speaking of the difficulties that people in mixed marriages face in regard to religion. Our divisions affect the well-being of individuals, families and local communities. People suffer.

I know that these pastoral concerns are uppermost in your minds because you come here as pastors, whose primary concern is the Christian well-being of people. But pastoral problems can never be resolved surely or fully if we gloss over the differences in faith of which those pastoral problems are the fruit.

Thirdly, while always going forward, our approach to ecumenism must be consistent with truth, and take into account the full range of issues that are required for adequate solutions to problems.

Here we call to mind the problem of Eucharistic sharing. The inability to share the Eucharist is one of the results of the tragic events of centuries past. The ecumenical collaboration which now takes place among our people creates a desire for prayer in common, and even a hunger to share the Eucharist. Yet we do not share the Eucharist.

In recent times, the important results of ecumenical dialogues have shown a growing convergence among many Churches and ecclesial communities on the meaning of the Eucharist. We rejoice in this because it is a step towards a solution to the problem. But for Catholics, the problem of Eucharistic sharing cannot be resolved in isolation from our understanding of the mystery of the Church and of the ministry which serves unity. All of these issues must be dealt with in relationship to one another.

In this regard we take note of the fact that ministry and ecclesiology are being studied in many bilateral and multilateral dialogues. The emerging results of these studies are very promising, and in this we rejoice. According to St Paul, by "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ". Let us support each other in seeking lasting solutions to the problems that divide us.

Much progress has been made, and for this we are grateful. We must see that further ecumenical advances take place. There can be no going back. We must go forward.

I believe that every sincere effort in dialogue, with the objective of overcoming barriers that

separate Christians, is a response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is in this light that I see your visit this week. I assure you of my prayers and offer my best wishes for the Lord's guidance as you continue to work for reconciliation. Let us pray for one another, asking Christ to show us the way to come to him together.

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