



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

ECUMENICAL MEETING
AT THE LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL OF NIDAROS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Trondheim, Norway
Friday, 2 June 1989

Dear Friends,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Eph. 1, 2*). These words of Saint Paul aptly describe my own prayerful good wishes for each of you and for all the people of Norway. I thank God for this *opportunity to listen to God's word together with you* and to reflect with you on its meaning for the life of the Church and the world.

My special greeting goes to the bishops of the Lutheran Church of Norway, the representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, the State and Municipal officials, my fellow Catholics and to all who are present here today. I am especially grateful to Bishop Bremer for inviting me in the name of the Lutheran Church of Norway to this venerable place of worship.

2. This cathedral at Nidaros was built by your ancestors over the grave of the great Saint Olav, who played such a crucial role in the spread of Christianity in this land. In this and in many other ways, the cathedral bears witness to the *spiritual, political and cultural history of your nation*. It also speaks to us of *an age when Christians had not yet suffered the sadness of divisions*. Both Protestants and Catholics in Norway look to Saint Olav for their roots in the past and for the inspiration they need to live in the present a truly Christian life.

To be sure, this cathedral is more than a building of stone. It is a place where, for centuries,

people have been reborn as children of God in Baptism, where they have heard the word of God proclaimed in the Scriptures as we have today, and have offered him the Church's worship; a place where in personal prayer they have made known to God their needs and have thanked him for his blessings. For medieval pilgrims who came to Nidaros after a long and arduous journey, the cathedral was also a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem towards which we move on our earthly pilgrimage. Truly *a cathedral* such as this is more than a building of stone. It turns our spiritual gaze heavenward. It *lifts our minds and hearts to God*.

3. Dear brothers and sisters: we must surely recognize that *the mind and heart of modern man need to be lifted up to God*. We must acknowledge that for all the advances of modern science and technology which are transforming the way we live, humanity, in the words of Saint Paul, still "groans inwardly" (Cfr. *Rom.* 8, 23) in expectation of something further. Indeed, the whole of creation "groans in travail" (Cfr. *ibid.* 8, 20. 22) for something beyond our human power to give.

Science and technology, by which the material cares and burdens of life are increasingly lightened are true achievements of man's creative energy and intelligence. But knowledge of this kind creates problems as well as solving them. We have only to think of the environmental and social impact of our modern way of life, or of the dangers created by our use of the atom or of biomedical techniques. *Science and technology*, like the economic life that they generate, *cannot of themselves articulate the meaning of existence or of human striving*. They cannot of themselves explain, much less eliminate, evil, suffering and death.

Nor may we forget that the "modern man" of whom we speak is not an abstraction, but rather *the concrete person that each of us is, a human being with a heart as well as a mind*. Here, too, many dilemmas beset us. *We strive for love*, without which we cannot live, yet today the most basic relationships of love in marriage and the family are threatened by divorce, broken homes and a radical questioning of the very meaning of manhood and woman-hood. *We strive for security, wellbeing and a sense of self-worth*, yet the traditions of community, family, home and work are being undermined by transformations which do not always acknowledge the ethical dimension inherent in all human activity and endeavour. *We wish to be free*, but unless there is a common understanding of what we ought to do and not simply what we can do, freedom ends in the tyranny of selfishness and superior force.

What is needed in the midst of these personal and social ills *is a higher wisdom which transforms the mind and heart and will*: a wisdom which perfects the human intellect by gently drawing it to look for and to love what is true and good, thus leading man *through visible realities to those which cannot be seen*. The Catholic bishops at the Second Vatican Council warned that: "Our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser people are forthcoming" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 15).

4. Dear friends: today in this Cathedral of Nidaros, built to the glory of God as a beacon pointing heavenward in the midst of the modern world, we stand together in order to proclaim the *Good News of redemption in Jesus Christ*. Through him we come to know the meaning of creation and of human activity within the plan of God. *Jesus Christ is our wisdom. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life* (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 6). If creation is still “subject to futility”, it is so in *the hope of being transformed in Christ*. If humanity “groans in travail”, it does so to the extent that people’s minds and hearts are not lifted up with Christ to God, that consciences are not conformed through Christ to the wisdom that comes from God.

As Christians we proclaim a wisdom that recognizes and upholds the *priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of the person over things, the superiority of spirit over matter* (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 16). We are able to make these assertions because Christ has shown us that our human destiny is a personal moral and spiritual one; it lies in a filial relationship to God.

Through faith and baptism we have come to know that *wisdom is offered as a divine gift* but it also *confounds the human intellect if it remains closed to the transcendent*. It is a revealed wisdom which teaches us that the God of the universe is not an impersonal or unknowable force but a Father. In moments of interior enlightenment, Jesus’ words re-echo in our hearts: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (*Matth.* 11, 25).

5. Our task is to *open the mind of modern man to divine wisdom, to open the heart of modern man to God*. We do so in the manner of Christ, who is “gentle and lowly in heart”, whose “yoke is easy and burden light” (Cfr. *ibid.* 11, 29-30). By proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed, we bear witness before all to the path that leads to life. And we do this not as isolated individuals, but *as persons united in Christ through our baptism*.

Clearly such witness constitutes an ecumenical challenge for all those who, as Saint Paul says, “have heard the word of truth “and have been” sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (*Eph.* 1, 13). Today on the eve of the third Christian millennium, the world needs to hear the Good News of salvation no less than it did in the first and second millennia. It is *all the more urgent that Christians work for the gradual elimination of their differences* and bear common witness to the Gospel.

Today in this cathedral, I give thanks to God for the grace of the ecumenical movement which we have experienced in our time. Through the working of the Holy Spirit *new relationships have begun to develop between Christians* who have been divided from one another for centuries. I also wish to express gratitude to all those in Norway who have responded to this grace and have worked with dedication to promote the unity of Christians in accordance with Christ’s will. May you *persevere along this path with patience and love*, so that the dialogue between us will continue

with mutual respect and trust as we seek unity in the full truth of Christ.

Preparations for the *millennium celebration in 1997 of the foundation of Trondheim* will be an opportunity for Lutherans, Catholics and all Christians in Norway to reflect further on the common roots of your faith and on the gospel values which have shaped your common history. It will also be an opportunity for prayer – fervent unceasing prayer for the unity of all Christ’s followers, since in the end we know that unity will come only as a gift from God.

6. Dear brothers and sisters: *before us lies the duty of opening a new Christian chapter in history in response to the many challenges of a changing world.* In centuries past the Church led the peoples of Europe to the baptismal font and the cultural identity of Europe grew out of the Christian faith. The centrality of the person, the role of the family in society, the rights of the individual and of groups the moral and ethical values which gave direction and inspiration to human behaviour, all developed in contact with the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In today’s Europe, however, there is taking place a cultural clash of enormous consequences: it is a clash between two visions of life, the one revealed in Christ wherein God is accepted as the ultimate and recognized source of truth, goodness and freedom and the other of the world, closed to transcendence, wherein all is to be built on humanity’s efforts to give meaning and direction to itself through social consensus. Christians understand what is at stake. The history of our own century clearly shows that *where no transcendent norm is acknowledged, people are in danger of surrendering themselves to forces which take command of society without concern for individuals and their freedoms.*

The Catholic Church seeks no privilege but expects only that civil and religious freedom should be effectively guaranteed so that she can proclaim her message and address the basic questions posed by human existence in the contemporary world. Speaking to the European Parliament in October of last year I stressed that “if the underlying religious and Christian fabric of this continent were to be denied as an inspiration to morality or as a positive factor in society, not only would the entire heritage of our European past be negated, but the future dignity of the people of Europe... would be gravely endangered” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad "Parlamento Europeo"*, 11, die 11 oct. 1988).

The time for wisdom on the part of everyone is now! *The time for a renewed witness of faith on the part of Christians is now!* We are being challenged to bring to humanity the Gospel of Christ, the Good News of redemption and of adoption as God’s children. We are being challenged to bear witness to the wisdom of the Incarnate Word, Christ the “Light of the Nations” (Cfr. *Luc. 2, 32*), a light that leads to fullness of life for those who accept it. In the face of such great challenges, the Spirit of truth is urging us to persevere in the ecumenical task.

With confidence in God “who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask” (*Eph. 3, 20*) let us take up the challenge of a new evangelization. Let us proclaim

once more the wisdom of the Beatitudes to a world in need of peace, of love and of brotherhood. Let us proclaim once more the truth of Christ, our Crucified and Risen Saviour. He is the “goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart, and the answer to all its yearnings” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 14). May God be with you all. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. Amen.

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