



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO A GROUP OF CATHOLIC AND ANGLICAN BISHOPS  
FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*Monday, 7 November 1994*

*Dear Brothers in Christ,*<sup>1</sup> It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican, *Bishops of the Anglican Communion and Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States*. You have come to Rome on a pilgrimage which has included another important stage at Canterbury. I appreciate the greetings which you have conveyed from Archbishop Carey and I gladly reciprocate. You are making this journey in the spirit of ecumenical brotherhood, with the desire to promote ever more intense dialogue between Anglicans and Catholics in your country. I thank Bishop Griswold for his kind words, and I take comfort from the fact that we agree in seeing a "divine summons and grace" in the longing for unity which the Holy Spirit has for many years been stimulating in the hearts of Christ's followers (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).<sup>2</sup> It is already a wonderful gift of God's grace that we concur in acknowledging that *ecumenical relations are an essential requirement of our obedience to the Lord*. Jesus in fact prayed to the Father for his disciples "that they may be one . . . so that the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21). We can all be encouraged at the progress already made along this road. You in particular can point to many valid examples within the United States of co-operation in Christian witness and in service between Anglican and Catholic Dioceses and parishes. Common prayer for unity has become almost an habitual occurrence. You are also immediately aware of the need for common witness in matters of Christian morality. Building on what has already been evidenced in the document of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, you are increasingly challenged, in order to be faithful to the Divine Teacher, to seek a united stance in the moral questions which so deeply affect the men and women of our time. For all of this, for the "grace of God which was given you in Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4), we must be thankful.<sup>3</sup> At the same time we are painfully aware of the further obstacles along the way. We should neither be surprised nor held back by the difficulties involved. Among them, you have mentioned the serious disagreement between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion over the ordination of women to the priesthood. At the same time it is heartening to hear you place this important issue in its proper perspective, *a profound ecclesiological perspective which sees the Church's first duty as obedience to Christ the Head* (cf. Eph. 5:23), a perspective which implies limits to our authority in relation to what has been handed down (cf. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 4). Only a theological vision inspired by prayerful, contemplative faith will ensure openness to the Spirit's sure guidance as we continue our pilgrimage towards full communion.<sup>4</sup> In the face of these and

other difficulties, where does our ecumenical hope lie? It is grounded in the very strength of the things which unite us in spite of our differences. Anglicans and Catholics already share a deep faith in the mysteries of our Redeemer's life, death and resurrection. These mysteries, made present to us in Baptism, are the well-spring of our lives in the Church. Baptism however is "a beginning, a point of departure"; it is "wholly directed towards the acquiring of the fullness of life in Christ" (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22). Baptism thus contains *an internal dynamism towards an ever fuller participation in the Church* as a community of faith and visible communion. Our hope therefore is not of our own making, but flows ever new from the efficacy of the very gifts by which God constitutes his People on earth, the Church which journeys in a foreign land, away from her Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:6), until she appears in glory with her Spouse (cf. Col. 3:1-4; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 6). I pray, as we approach the Year 2000, that the Lord will guide us as we move ahead on the way to full communion, so that we can once again bear witness together to the Gospel of Christ, "that the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21). In friendship I invoke upon you the grace and peace of God. © Copyright 1994 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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