



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience of the Holy Father with participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

At 10.30 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to whom he gave the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Mister Cardinals

Dear brother bishops and priests,

dear brothers and sisters,

I am glad to welcome you and I am grateful to Cardinal Koch for the words he addressed to me. I greet and warmly thank all of you, collaborators, members and consultors of the Pontifical Council, because with your daily effort you help me to offer my ministry as bishop of Rome as a service of unity and communion, with different methods and forms, for all believers in Christ.

Recently, some meeting with Christians of different traditions have been of great importance and comfort. Praying together to the Heads of the Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches in Bari, in communion with those who suffer in the beloved and tormented Middle East, reminded us that we cannot remain indifferent before the sufferings, unfortunately still very current, of so many of our brothers and sisters. United with Christians of various traditions in Geneva, in the framework of the seventieth anniversary of the World Council of Churches, was an opportunity to renew our irreversible commitment to the promotion of ever greater unity between believers. Celebrating together with many Pentecostal brothers the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome, at the Circus Maximus, in one of the places where Christians of the first centuries suffered

the most for Christ, enabled Catholics and Pentecostals to show their gifts and charisms, bestowed by the same Spirit in a symphony of praise to the Lord Jesus, renewing their commitment to fulfil the missionary mandate to the extreme ends of the earth. These are some of the salient moments in the ecumenical journey that all Christians are called to realize by walking together, praying together and working together, waiting for the Lord to lead us to the restoration of full unity. And I would like to add that the current meeting – His Eminence was present at both of them – with the “Youth 17” group from the United States and the pastors: there is a great friendship and familiarity that helps a lot.

The theme chosen for your Plenary – “Pentecostals, charismatics and evangelicals: impact on the concept of unity” - is very timely. The constant growth of these new expressions of Christian life is a very significant phenomenon, which can not be overlooked. The concrete forms of the communities inspired by these movements are often linked to the particular geographical, cultural and social context in which they develop, and therefore my brief reflection will not take into account the individual situations, but will refer to the overall phenomenon.

First of all, we have the duty to discern and recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in these communities, trying to construct bonds of authentic fraternity with them. This will be possible by multiplying the opportunities for meeting and overcoming mutual distrust, motivated many times by ignorance or lack of understanding. And I would like to offer you a personal experience and declare a *mea culpa*. When I was provincial [superior], I had forbidden Jesuits to enter into relationships with these people - with the Catholic Renewal - and I said that more than a prayer meeting it seemed like a “samba school”! Then I apologized, and as a bishop I had a good relationship with them, with Mass in the cathedral ... But it takes a journey to understand. Among the various shared activities are prayer, listening to the Word of God, service to the needy, the proclamation of the Gospel, the defence of the dignity of the person and of human life. In a fraternal mutual acquaintance, we Catholics can learn to appreciate the experience of many communities that, often in ways different from those to which we are accustomed, live their faith, praise God and witness the Gospel in charity. At the same time, they will be helped to overcome prejudices about the Catholic Church and to recognize that in the priceless treasure of tradition, received from the Apostles and kept in the course of history, the Holy Spirit is not at all extinguished or suffocated, but continues to operate effectively.

I am aware that, in many cases, relations between Catholics and Pentecostals, charismatics and evangelicals are not easy. The sudden appearance of new communities, linked to the personality of some preachers, strongly contrasts with the ecclesiological principles and experience of the historical Churches and can conceal the danger of being carried away by the emotional waves of the moment and or of enclosing the experience of faith in protected and reassuring environments. The fact that more than a few Catholic faithful are attracted to these communities is a source of friction, but can become, for our part, a matter of personal examination and pastoral renewal.

In fact, many communities are inspired by these movements and live authentic Christian experiences in contact with the Word of God and in obedience to the action of the Spirit, which leads us to love, witness and serve. Even these communities, as the Second Vatican Council taught, are by no means devoid of meaning and value in the mystery of salvation (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3). Catholics can welcome those riches that, under the guidance of the Spirit, contribute greatly to the fulfilment of the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In fact, the Church grows in fidelity to the Holy Spirit the more she learns not to tame it, but to accept without fear and at the same time with serious discernment its fresh newness. The Holy Spirit is always new. Always. And we have to get used to it. It is newness that makes us understand things more deeply, with more light, and makes us change so many habits, even disciplinary habits. But He is the Lord of newness. Jesus told us that He will teach us; He will remind us of what He has taught us, and then He will teach us. We must be open to this. It is therefore necessary to avoid settling on static and immutable positions, to embrace the risk of venturing into the promotion of unity: with faithful ecclesial obedience and without extinguishing the Spirit (cf. 1 *Thess* 5:19). It is the Spirit Who creates and recreates the newness of Christian life, and it is the Spirit Himself Who leads everything back to true unity, which is not uniformity. For this openness of heart, the search for communion and careful discernment are the attitudes that should characterize our relationships according to the Spirit.

In this, the dialogues carried out by your Pontifical Council with the Pentecostals, the charismatics and the evangelicals at international level, including through initiatives such as the Global Christian Forum, represent a significant contribution and encouragement to the development of better relations at local level.

This week I had the joy of having mature ecumenical experiences in the “Marian Land”: the ecumenical celebration in the capital of Latvia, then the ecumenical meeting before the Gate of Our Lady in Vilnius ... These were moments of ecumenical maturity. I had never thought that the ecumenical movement was – in those places – so mature. In the certainty of being able to count on your dedication, as well as on your prayer for me, I renew my gratitude and heartily I give you my Blessing.
