



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR THE WORLD CONGRESS OF ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW COMMUNITIES

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. "We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes 1:2-3). These words of the Apostle Paul re-echo in my heart with grateful joy as I send you a warm greeting and assure you of my spiritual closeness in anticipation of our meeting in the Vatican.

I extend an affectionate greeting to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal James Francis Stafford; to the Secretary, Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, and to the dicastery's staff. My greeting also goes to the leaders and delegates of the various movements, to the Pastors who are accompanying them and to the distinguished speakers.

During your World Congress, you are addressing the theme: "*Ecclesial Movements: Communion and Mission on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*". I thank the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which has taken responsibility for promoting and organizing this important meeting, as well as the movements that have promptly and willingly accepted the invitation I extended to them on the Vigil of Pentecost two years ago. On that occasion, I hoped that on the way to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, during the year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, they would offer a "joint witness" and "in communion with the Pastors and linked with diocesan programmes, [they would bring] their spiritual, educational and missionary riches to the heart of the Church as a precious experience and proposal of Christian life" (*Homily on the Vigil of Pentecost*, 25 May 1996, n. 7; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 29 May 1996, p. 2).

I deeply hope that your congress and the meeting on 30 May 1998 in St Peter's Square will highlight the fruitful vitality of the movements among the People of God, who are preparing to cross the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian era.

2. I am thinking at this moment of the international conferences organized in Rome in 1981, in Rocca di Papa in 1987

and in Bratislava in 1991. I followed their work attentively, accompanying them with prayer and constant encouragement. From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have given special importance to the progress of ecclesial movements, and I have had the opportunity to appreciate the results of their widespread and growing presence during my pastoral visits to parishes and my apostolic journeys. I have noticed with pleasure their willingness to devote their energies to the service of the See of Peter and the local Churches. I have been able to point to them as something new that is still waiting to be properly accepted and appreciated. Today I notice, with great joy, that they have a more mature self-knowledge. They represent one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council, but unfortunately has often been hampered by the spread of secularization. Their presence is encouraging because it shows that this springtime is advancing and revealing the freshness of the Christian experience based on personal encounter with Christ. Even in the diversity of their forms, these movements are marked by a common awareness of the "newness" which baptismal grace brings to life, through a remarkable longing to reflect on the mystery of communion with Christ and with their brethren, through sound fidelity to the patrimony of the faith passed on by the living stream of Tradition. This gives rise to a renewed missionary zeal which reaches out to the men and women of our era in the concrete situations where they find themselves, and turns its loving attention to the dignity, needs and destiny of each individual.

These are the reasons for the "*joint witness*" which, thanks to the service you have received from the Pontifical Council for the Laity and in a spirit of friendship, dialogue and collaboration with all the movements, is now given concrete expression at this World Congress and, particularly, in a few days at the eagerly awaited "Meeting" in St Peter's Square. A "joint witness", moreover, which has already emerged and been tested in the arduous preparatory phase of these two events.

The significant presence among you of the superiors and representatives of other dicasteries of the Roman Curia, of Bishops from various continents and nations, of delegates from the International Unions of Superiors General, of the guests of various institutions and associations shows that the whole Church is involved in this endeavour, confirming that the dimension of communion is essential in the life of movements. The ecumenical dimension is also present, made tangible by the participation of fraternal delegates from other Churches and Christian Communions, to whom I address a special greeting.

3. The object of this World Congress is, on the one hand, to *examine the theological nature* and missionary task of the movements and, on the other, to *encourage mutual edification* through the exchange of testimonies and experiences. Your programme thus involves crucial aspects of the life of the movements which the Spirit of Christ has stirred up to give new apostolic fervour to the ecclesial structure. At the opening of your congress, I would like to propose for your consideration several reflections which we will certainly have occasion to emphasize later during the celebration in St Peter's Square on 30 May.

You represent more than 50 movements and new forms of community life, which are the expression of a multifaceted variety of charisms, educational methods and apostolic forms and goals. This multiplicity is lived in the unity of faith, hope and charity, in obedience to Christ and to the Pastors of the Church. Your very existence is a hymn to the unity in diversity desired by the Spirit and gives witness to it. Indeed, in the mystery of communion of the Body of Christ, unity is never a dull homogeneity or a denial of diversity, just as plurality must never become particularism or dispersion. That is

why each of your groups deserves to be appreciated for the particular contribution it makes to the life of the Church.

4. What is meant today by "movement"? The term is often used to refer to realities that differ among themselves, sometimes even by reason of their canonical structure. If, on the one hand, that structure certainly cannot exhaust or capture the wealth of forms produced by the life-giving creativity of Christ's Spirit, on the other, it indicates a concrete ecclesial reality with predominantly lay membership, a faith journey and Christian witness which bases its own pedagogical method on a precise charism given to the person of the founder in specific circumstances and ways.

The charism's own originality, which gives life to a movement, neither claims nor could claim to add anything to the richness of the *depositum fidei*, safeguarded by the Church with passionate fidelity. Nonetheless, it represents a powerful support, a moving and convincing reminder to live the Christian experience fully, with intelligence and creativity. Therein lies the basis for finding adequate responses to the challenges and needs of ever changing times and historical circumstances.

In this light, the charisms recognized by the Church are ways to deepen one's knowledge of Christ and to give oneself more generously to him, while rooting oneself more and more deeply in communion with the entire Christian people. For this reason they deserve attention from every member of the ecclesial community, beginning with the Pastors to whom the care of the particular Churches is entrusted in communion with the Vicar of Christ. Movements can thus make a valuable contribution to the vital dynamics of the one Church founded on Peter in the various local situations, especially in those regions where the *implantatio Ecclesiae* is still in its early stages or subject to many difficulties.

5. I have often had occasion to stress that there is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the *institutional dimension* and the *charismatic dimension*, of which movements are a significant expression. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus, because they both help to make the mystery of Christ and his saving work present in the world. Together they aim at renewing in their own ways the self-awareness of the Church, which in a certain sense can be called a "movement" herself, since she is the realization in time and space of the Father's sending of his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am convinced that my reflections will be given due consideration during the congress, which I accompany with the prayer that it may bear abundant fruit for the benefit of the Church and of all humanity.

With these sentiments, as I look forward to meeting you in St Peter's Square on the Vigil of Pentecost, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to those you represent.

From the Vatican, 27 May 1998

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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