



CHRISTIAN UNITY

Pope Benedict's address at the Ecumenical Celebration, Westminster Abbey, 17 September 2010



About this resource

In his speeches and homilies Pope Benedict XVI left the Church in England and Wales a legacy of reading material for ongoing reflection and prayer. From November 2011 - October 2012 one sheet will be offered monthly to assist deepening our shared appreciation and understanding of what he said.

Home Mission Desk, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales



'This year, as we know, marks the hundredth anniversary of the modern ecumenical movement, which began with the Edinburgh Conference's appeal for Christian unity as the prerequisite for a credible and convincing witness to the Gospel in our time. In commemorating this anniversary, we must give thanks for the remarkable progress made towards this noble goal through the efforts of committed Christians of every denomination.

At the same time, however, we remain conscious of how much yet remains to be done. In a world marked by growing interdependence and solidarity, we are challenged to proclaim with renewed conviction the reality of our reconciliation and

liberation in Christ, and to propose the truth of the Gospel as the key to an authentic and integral human development. In a society which has become increasingly indifferent or even hostile to the Christian message, we are all the more compelled to give a joyful and convincing account of the hope that is within us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), and to present the Risen Lord as the response to the deepest questions and spiritual aspirations of the men and women of our time.'

Full text: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Replay-the-Visit/Speeches/Speeches-17-September/Pope-s-Ecumenical-Celebration>

FOR REFLECTION

Across England and Wales Christians meet regularly under the banner of 'Churches Together' to grow in fellowship and friendship as brothers and sisters in Christ. During the Christmas season, for example, many work together to share the joy of the birth of Jesus Christ through organising joint events such as carol services and also co-run soup kitchens for the homeless. Churches Together groups are similarly active during Easter and at other times of the year.

This form of witness (also described as 'ecumenical' witness) is essential to the Lord's mission. It formed an important part of the Holy Father's visit to the UK and is integral to his ongoing work. In what ways do you and your parish prioritise this prophetic work? In the year ahead what specific ecumenical activities are in the diary? How are you sharing faith together in your local community?



Westminster Abbey Friday, 17 September 2010 © Mazur/www.thepapalvisit.org.uk



ECUMENISM AND MISSION



Image source:
<http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/The-Bishops-Work/Christian-Unity>

'The common witness given by all forms of ecumenical cooperation is already missionary. The ecumenical movement has, in fact, gone hand in hand with a new discovery by many communities of the missionary nature of the Church.

Ecumenical cooperation shows to the world that those who believe in Christ and live by his Spirit, being thus made children of God who is Father of all, can set about over coming human divisions, even about such sensitive matters as religious faith and practice, with courage and hope. The divisions that exist among Christians are certainly a major obstacle to the successful preaching of the Gospel. But the efforts being made to overcome them do much to offset the scandal and to give credibility to Christians who proclaim that Christ is the one in whom all things and people are gathered together into unity:

"As evangelizers we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of

unity given by the Church. This is a source of responsibility and also of comfort".

Ecumenical witness can be given in missionary activity itself. For Catholics, the basis for ecumenical cooperation with other Christians in mission is "the foundation of baptism and the patrimony of faith which is common to us" ...'

'Catholics can join with other Churches and ecclesial Communities —provided there is nothing sectarian or deliberately anti-Catholic about their work of evangelization—in organizations and programmes that give common support to the missionary activities of all the participating Churches.'

'Ecumenical cooperation is particularly necessary in the mission to the de-Christianized masses of our contemporary world. The ability of Christians, though still divided, to bear common witness, even now, to central truths of the Gospel can be a powerful invitation to a renewed appreciation of Christian faith in a secularized society. A common evaluation of the forms of atheism, secularization and materialism that are at work in the world of today, and a shared strategy to deal with them would greatly benefit the Christian mission to the contemporary world.'

Pause to re-read this extract and to reflect.

Text source: Pontificium Consilium ad Christianorum Unitatem Fovendam, Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism. Full text: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_p_c_chrstuni_doc_19930325_directory_en.html (paragraphs 205 - 9)

What is ecumenism?

'Ecumenism (unity or cooperation with other Christian churches) is about healing and forgiving the quarrels of the past, so we can all work together as a united witness to our shared faith in Christ. It's about acknowledging our faith differences, but celebrating the fact all co-exist within the family of Christ.'

Source: <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/The-Bishops-Work/Christian-Unity>

Blessed Maria Gabriella of Unity



Blessed Gabriella devoted her life to meditation and prayer centered on Chapter 17 of Saint John's

Gospel and offered her life for Christian Unity. More: <http://saints.sqpn.com/saintm63.htm>

Churches Together in England



'Churches Together' can be found at local & town, county & city, national and "four nations" levels. It is all about relationships and each expression of "Churches Together" has been established by the churches in that place and can be different in activity and membership.' See: http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/42314/Churches_Together_in.aspx Also see Churches Together in Wales: <http://www.cytun.org.uk/>