

## 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institute for Ecumenical Research

Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune, Strasbourg, 3 April 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear Friends,

Let me begin by saying how honoured I am by the invitation to preach the sermon at this service; it was with deeply felt joy that I accepted. However, honour is never entirely free of obligation and so I will not conceal my profound awareness of the difficulties created for my present task by this very honour and this very joy! I must in fact, and indeed I wish, to address at the same time both the community of the parish of Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune, which has generously welcomed us at its Sunday service, and the specialists and researchers of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, which this spring celebrates its fortieth anniversary. In a sermon I must respond appropriately to the Scriptural texts which we have just heard and at the same time I must celebrate the exceptional event which brings us together in the company of those who frequent rue Gustav Klotz ... and, what is more, I must do so as a Catholic Bishop whose very mission supplies the reason and the means not merely to support but also to practise an ecumenism informed by a lucidity and a responsibility at once theological and pastoral, pastoral and theological.

### 1. A beginning.

Since we must speak of ecumenism, I shall begin with what for me, as a Catholic, is the true beginning. I mean, of course, the Second Vatican Council, the conclusion of which, I note in passing, coincided with the foundation of the Institute in Strasbourg, and to which, I should also say, decisive contributions were made by the great Yves-Marie Congar. And I am sure that no one here will forget his previous stay in Strasbourg, nor the reasons for it.

Whereas Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mystici corporis* of 1943 was still teaching that the Catholic Church *is* the body of Christ, and that there can therefore exist no ecclesial reality worthy of the name outside this Church (even if non-Catholics may be *ordonati ad* to it), the Vatican Council on the other hand, thanks be to God, formally adopted a different and more open position. For its part, it taught that beyond the visible boundaries of Catholicism there can be not only individual Christians but also authentic and properly ecclesial realities, possibly on different levels, including even actual local churches. Other Christians are not simply “of

Christ” by virtue of their baptism, but also by virtue of the Spirit that they have received from “the Church of Christ” – at least in some form or other – which, of course, has to be clarified precisely by dialogue. For my part I believe that, certainly from the Catholic point of view, this is the real point of departure for an ecumenism that is genuine and, let it be said, quite simply honest. Here too, in my view, are the fundamental roots of the radical difference between ecumenism and inter-confessional dialogue.

## **2. Progress**

Building on such a beginning, there are two major steps forward that can and, it seems to me, should be noted and confirmed, as they have been in the major documents that now carry us forward. First I note that, thanks to the work instigated by the Foundation “Pro Oriente” in Vienna, and in accordance with the terms of the bilateral declarations of the Pope and the Eastern Patriarchs concerned, an agreement has been reached between the Catholic Church and a certain number of non-Chalcedonian Eastern churches (Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Malankara, Syrian) on their respective understandings of the mystery of Christ.

The principle which permitted such mutual understanding has been called upon to play a wider role and to permit further progress: given that East and West have evolved over the centuries in different socio-political and socio-cultural contexts, not only is a certain diversity entirely to be expected, but, in conditions that need to be specified in each separate case, it may become possible to admit that certain differences might continue for the very reason that, precisely on the basis of what is accepted as common ground, and despite what had hitherto been assumed, these differences may be seen as non-divisive. The application of this same principle of diversity reconciled, or of non-divisive difference, or again of differentiated unity, has led – as is known particularly at the Institute for Ecumenical Research because of the significant contribution that has been made there, and because of its range from East to West and from Orthodoxy to Protestantism – to the very famous and very important Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, solemnly signed in Augsburg in 1999, and celebrated here in Strasbourg in 2000, at Saint-Thomas to be precise, under circumstances that you know. To say what I think: however conscious I am of the reservations which remain about the agreement thus reached and the problems which it has left unresolved, which it has encountered, or which it has even provoked, I nevertheless see in it nothing less than a major historical achievement and so a major historical point of reference. And so I see it at one and the same time

as a pressing invitation to forge ahead and as a powerful support in developing the means to make real progress.

### **3. The way forward**

At this point I should refer to other steps that have been taken toward real ecumenical advance, pursued in the name of the two fundamental principles that I have just recalled:

— the other Church verifies, or can also verify, genuine characteristics of ecclesiality; and

— a true unity with this other Church may, indeed must, be capable of permitting the retention of a certain diversity.

Here I could, by way of example, mention the Lima documents (1982) on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” or the Leuenberg Agreement between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches (the realisation of which owed much to the contribution of our forty-year-old Institute for Ecumenical Research). But, this having been noted – and the list could easily be extended – I must also point out that at this initial stage there is still quite a long way to go. In my judgment our respective research and our multilateral dialogue on the subject of unity need to progress above all in two areas.

There is first of all, of course, the problem of ministeriality, which naturally also raises the question of the Petrine Ministry as such. What is the real meaning of the pastoral office in the wider sense, in the Church of Christ? 1) What distinctive contribution is the Church, the body of which Christ is the Head, capable of making to the divine, christic and spiritual, work of salvation? 2) In what manner should the exercise of this contribution by the ministry be diversified: episcopacy, priesthood-presbytery, diaconate, full ministry of the laity, who nevertheless remain laity? These questions and some others ought in future, it seems to me, to be in the foreground of our ecumenical concerns and exchanges.

A second problem, or group of questions requiring our attention: ethical questions – which should, and indeed must, embrace the question of the *moral law* as such. What authority is ultimately qualified to decide what is right, not simply in each separate case “hic et nunc” but “in genere”, not simply in terms of a “general moral law”, but with regard to both the uniqueness and the complexity of each concrete situation? Whether it be a question of abortion or euthanasia, or else, in a different order of things of course, homosexuality, we see differences not only between Catholics and other Christians, but among Catholics themselves, and also, at any

rate to a certain degree, among Anglicans, Lutherans and the Reformed Churches. This inevitably gives rise to the following question: in what way are the evangelical appeal and the “expertise in humanity” to which the Church can lay claim, capable of facilitating the difficult choices that people face today? In the modern and post-modern culture of the present what should be the relationship of that “Christian liberty”, so dear to Luther and St. Paul alike, to the extremely liberal liberty of our western world? Even more than the unresolved questions that specifically concern the churches, which are the first to be raised, it is these extra-ecclesial questions which ought, it seems to me, to be at one and the same time on the horizon and at the heart of ecumenical dialogue in the future.

#### **4. The spirit of the future**

The tasks facing us are most certainly numerous and difficult, as we have just seen. Nevertheless I, for my part, believe that, proceeding down the path on which we have set out, we can pursue our route, both reaching out with our whole being toward the future, as St. Paul says, and at the same time secure in the knowledge that God will be able to lead us on paths which, in every case, are and cannot but be His. This brings me to say in conclusion a few words about what might for us be the spirit of the future. To make things clear I will avail myself of the verses of Scripture that we have just heard read.

The first element of this spirit might be, let us say, courage and steadfastness, according to the teaching of the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 40:

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters, dear Friends, let us walk together and not be weary and not faint – which means: bearing our weariness and faintness, does it not? – along the paths where God leads us, to face unflinchingly the questions posed by the reality of the present day.

The second element will be of the order of faith and prayer. We reflect and we will work for unity; but we know in faith that God alone can realise this and will realise it through us and beyond us. Here our second lesson, taken from the First Epistle of the Apostle St. Peter, will enlighten us:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which... hath begotten us again... to an inheritance... reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Alongside the courage and steadfastness which will be our part, and in the faith and prayer which will give us access to God’s work, a third element of the spirit of the future will be our concern to give signs and ourselves to be a sign. Of course these signs do not exempt anyone from the courage of commitment nor from the availability of faith, but they permit us, on both these counts, to be qualified and credible witnesses in this world that is at one and the same time so credulous and yet so lacking in belief; this is evoked in chapter 20 of the Gospel of St. John, who presented to us simultaneously the Risen Christ Himself and the signs of His manifestation, the steps necessary to recognise Him, and the mission of witness which proceeds from this for us: “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

The last words of the passage from St. Peter, which was read to us a few moments ago, now provide me with my conclusion:

“The trial of your faith... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

Amen !

Joseph DORÉ

Archbishop of Strasbourg