

## Pope's Address to Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

January 27, 2012

Lord Cardinals,

venerable brothers in the episcopate and priesthood,

dear brothers and sisters!

It is always a joy for me to meet with you on the occasion of your plenary session and to express my appreciation for the service that you undertake for the Church and especially for the Successor of Peter in his office of confirming the brethren in faith (cf. Luke 22:32). I thank Cardinal Levada for his cordial address of greeting in which he recalled some important tasks discharged by the dicastery in recent years. And I am particularly grateful to the Congregation for its work with the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization in preparing the Year of Faith, recognizing in it a propitious moment for re-proposing to all the gift of faith in the risen Christ, the luminous teaching of Vatican Council II and the precious doctrinal synthesis offered by the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

As we know, in vast areas of the world the faith is in danger of being extinguished, like a flame that has lost its fuel. We are facing a profound crisis of faith, a loss of the religious sense, that constitutes the Church's greatest challenge today. The renewal of faith, then, must be the priority in the work of the whole Church in our time. It is my wish that the Year of Faith contribute, with the cordial collaboration of all of the People of God, to making God present again in this world and to opening to men the way to faith, to entrusting themselves to that God who loved us to the end (cf. John 13:1), in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. The theme of the unity of Christians is closely connected to this task. I would therefore like to reflect on some doctrinal aspects that regard the Church's ecumenical path, which has been the object of deep reflection during this plenary session, coinciding with the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In fact, the spirit of ecumenical work must begin with that "spiritual ecumenism," with that "soul of the whole ecumenical movement" ("*Unitatis redintegratio*," 8), which is found in the spirit of prayer that "all may be one" (John 17:21).

The consistency of the ecumenical task with the teaching of Vatican II and with the whole tradition has been one of the areas to which the Congregation, in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has given its attention. Today we can observe that many good fruits have been produced from ecumenical dialogues but we must also note that the risk of a false irenicism and of an indifferentism, that is completely alien to the mind of Vatican II, require our vigilance. This indifferentism is caused by the opinion, which continues to spread, that truth is not accessible to man and that it is thus necessary to limit ourselves to finding rules for a praxis that would be capable of improving the world. And in this way the faith would be replaced by a moralism without any deep foundation. The center of true ecumenism is instead the faith in which man encounters the truth that is revealed in the Word of God. Without the faith the whole ecumenical movement would be reduced to a form of "social contract" that is agreed to because of a common interest, a "praxeology" aimed at creating a better world. The logic of Vatican II is completely different: the pursuit of the complete unity of Christians is a dynamism animated by the Word of God, by the divine Truth that speaks to us in this Word.

The crucial problem, which cuts across ecumenical dialogues, is therefore the question of the structure of revelation -- the relation between sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the office of the successors of the Apostles as witness to the true faith: and here the theme of ecclesiology, which is a part of this issue, is implicit: how God's truth reaches us. The discernment between Tradition with a capital "T" and traditions, among other things, is fundamental here. I do not wish to enter into details but only to make an observation. An important step in such a discernment was accomplished in the preparation and application of provisions for groups of faithful coming from Anglicanism, who desire to enter into full communion with the Church, into the unity of the common and essential divine Tradition,

maintaining their own spiritual, liturgical and pastoral traditions, which are in conformity with the Catholic faith (cf. "*Anglicanorum coetibus*," art. III). There exists, in fact, a spiritual richness in the different Christian confessions, which is the expression of the one faith and a gift to share and discover together in the Tradition of the Church.

Today, then, one of the fundamental questions has to do with the problem of the appropriate methods in various ecumenical dialogues. These too must reflect the priority of faith. Knowing the truth is the right of every interlocutor in true dialogue. It is the demand of charity itself for our brother. In this sense, it is necessary even to face controversial questions and to do so with courage, always in the spirit of fraternity and reciprocal respect. It is important, moreover, to offer a correct interpretation of that "order or 'hierarchy' of truths in Catholic doctrine" spoken of by the decree "*Unitatis redintegratio*" (n. 11), which does not in any way mean reducing the deposit of faith, but making its internal organic structure emerge. The study documents produced by various ecumenical dialogues also have great relevance. Such texts cannot be ignored since they constitute an important fruit, even if provisional, of common reflection that has developed over the years. Nonetheless, their proper significance must be recognized as contributions offered to the competent Authority of the Church, who alone is called to judge them in a definitive way. To ascribe to such texts a binding or almost conclusive weight in thorny questions of dialogue without the necessary evaluation by the ecclesial Authority would, in the final analysis, not help the path toward full unity in the faith.

A last question that I would like finally to mention is the issue of morality, which is a new challenge for the ecumenical journey. In dialogues we cannot ignore the great moral questions about human life, the family, sexuality, bioethics, freedom, justice and peace. It will be important to speak on these topics with one voice, drawing from the foundation of Scripture and the living tradition of the Church. This tradition helps us to decipher the language of the Creator in his creation. Defending fundamental values of the great tradition of the Church, we defend man, we defend creation.

In concluding these reflections, I hope for the Congregation's close and fraternal collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity with the goal of effectively promoting the re-establishment of complete unity among Christians. Division among Christians, in fact, "is not only openly opposed to the will of Christ, but it is also a scandal to the world and damages the holiest of causes: the preaching of the Gospel to every creature" ("*Unitatis redintegratio*," 1). Unity is therefore not only the fruit of faith but also a means and almost a presupposition of proclaiming the faith in an ever more credible way to those who do not yet know the Savior. Jesus prayed: "As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, that the world believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

In renewing my gratitude for your service, I assure you of my constant spiritual nearness and from my heart impart to you the Apostolic Blessing. Thank you.

