

January 2011

### *Letter of the Archbishop on the Unity of Christians*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At Bellahouston on that unforgettable evening of 16<sup>th</sup> September, Pope Benedict XVI made reference to the words which his predecessor had spoken in that very place when he challenged us for the future to walk hand in hand with our fellow-Christians.

The Holy Father said: "I note with great satisfaction how Pope John Paul II's call to you had led to greater trust and friendship with the members of the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and others. Let me encourage you to continue to pray and work with them in building a brighter future for Scotland based upon our common Christian heritage". And the Holy Father added: "Let us give thanks to God for the promise which ecumenical understanding and cooperation represent for united witness to the saving truth of God's word in today's rapidly changing society".

When Jesus at the Last Supper prayed for His disciples He did so in these terms: "May they all be one Father, may they be one in Us as You are in Me and I am in You, so that the world may believe it was You who sent Me". (Jn. 17: 21) Pope Benedict is reflecting those very words when he speaks of "united witness to the saving truth of God's word in today's rapidly changing society". He is also reiterating the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The introduction to its decree on ecumenism states: "Promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the chief concerns of (this council). The Church established by Christ is indeed one and unique". And it is to that that we wear our weekly testimony of faith when in the Creed we state: "We believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church". It is towards that unity that we wish to draw all who belong to Christ, and all those who by witness of our faith will be attracted to His truth.

It is important to note that the unity which Jesus described is not merely something external, as of a federation of Churches, or of greater cooperation in the care of the poor; the union is in the nature of *communion*, a deep interpersonal unity, based upon faith held in common, initiated and nourished by the sacraments, and expressed by a common order. It is not the work of man but the work of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, which is why the Fathers of the Council described the grace as the result of "a change of heart and holiness of life" which "along with

public and private prayer for the unity of Christians should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement”.

We are in fact on the eve of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This week comes, in the context of our Archdiocese, after our celebrating the Feast of Saint Mungo, our patron saint and founder of that Christian community which gave birth to our city and Archdiocese. In recent years we have marked the feast by ecumenical events, particularly by gathering at Saint Mungo’s Cathedral in order to bear witness to our love for one another and to pray at the tomb of Saint Mungo for the unity of Christians.

We have, therefore, already embarked upon this journey. The pathway is one of initial mutual respect and friendship; it makes progress through a sharing and service of the community; it proceeds through a seeking of the truth which we already hold in common; and it gains strength through prayer in common, which cannot be simply committed to one week in the year.

I want to thank all of you; priests, deacons, religious and people, who are already striving in your parishes and in places of encounter with others to foster that unity.

Finally, I recall that following those words of Pope John Paul II at Bellahouston there was a significant qualitative change in our relationships in this very city and elsewhere, manifested when after twenty-eight years another Pope came among us. I have every confidence that this visit also will have its impact on our relationships, and will further the journey towards that full organic unity, that communion, for which Christ prayed.

With my warmest blessings,  
Yours devotedly in Christ,

✠ Mario Conti  
Archbishop of Glasgow

*Ad Clerum: This letter is to be read out or distributed in copy on the weekend of 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> January with your encouragement. Many thanks.*