

AN APOLOGETIC EXPLANATION OF **ECUMENISM**

What is ecumenism?

“The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (Jn 17:22-23)



Ecumenism refers to the effort—and the obligation—of all Christian churches separated by matters of faith, practice, and teaching authority to seek unity according to the will of Christ.

Christ founded one Church, but subsequent disagreements among her members led to the fragmentation and splintering of the People of God. “Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time” (UR 4). While the Catholic Church remains rooted in the apostolic Faith under the leadership of the Pope and the bishops in union with him—the successors of St. Peter and the Apostles—there are many others that have separated from this faith to varying degrees: the Eastern Orthodox Churches, several Oriental Orthodox Churches, and thousands of major and minor denominations and ecclesial communities of Protestantism. These divisions are often deep and complex, going back hundreds of years. Yet because it was the desire of Christ and a vocation from the Holy Spirit that all believers be united as one body (cf. UR 1), we have a solemn obligation to work toward such unity. This effort is called ecumenism. (Cf. CCC 816-820)

Ecumenism necessarily involves the commitment of the entire Church, yet we realize that to repair the many divisions and to find real unity can only happen by the power of God and his Holy Spirit, who calls us to be one. Thus while dialogues and doctrinal discussions remain part of the process, it is above all prayer and humility before God that will draw the many churches and ecclesial communities toward that goal of unity. (Cf. CCC 822)

Ecumenism requires several practical elements on the part of Christians. These include continued renewal of the Church and her members, an ongoing conversion of hearts, prayer in communion among separated churches, fraternal knowledge of each other as fellow sons and daughters of God, sound education of Church members in the necessity of Christian unity, theological dialogue, and the commitment to work together for causes in which we fundamentally agree, such as service to the needy and oppressed. (Cf. CCC 821)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses this question in paragraph 820.