

HOMILY BY EDWARD IDRIS CARDINAL CASSIDY
PRESIDENT, THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. In the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, the Apostle of the Gentiles explains to the early Christians of Corinth the special role that God had given to him in calling him to take the Good News of salvation to the pagan world. He had been called to build the Church of Christ, by laying the solid foundations upon which this building would be established. He was to be the architect, as it were, and the one to begin the work. Others would then come along and continue that work: “By the grace of God gave me, he writes, I succeeded as an Architect and laid the foundations, on which someone else is doing the building”.

2. To build well, it is essential, however, that the foundations are laid around the corner stone that will support and hold firm a new edifice. For St. Paul, that corner stone could be only one, namely Jesus Christ. It was in that name that he had begun the building, and whoever else might wish to continue the building would have to do so on that sure foundation: “For the foundation, nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ”.

3. We who are gathered here today, twenty centuries later, are called to continue that building. We are among those to whom St. Paul refers when he speaks of “someone else who is doing the building”. Our task is not only to continue the building but unfortunately we have also the duty of seeking to repair the damage that has been done to that building by the storms, conflicts and at times by human-made earthquakes. We have to do that together by building on that one foundation stone that has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ and his Gospel. There is no other foundation stone but that if we are to be true to the calling that we have received. The Good News of Jesus Christ is as valid today as

it was for the people of Corinth at the time of Saint Paul. It is the good news of salvation for all people of all times.

4. Saint Paul succeeded in his task “by the grace God gave him”. We too have succeeded in bringing here today a document that takes forward in a significant way the work of restoration of unity among the followers of Christ. That we have succeeded is certainly “by the grace that God has given us”, a grace that has come to us freely and has opened our hearts and our minds to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We give thanks to God for this grace, as we promise to continue the task of restoring the building that is his Church.

5. Finally, St. Paul reminds those who would build the Kingdom of God that they “must work carefully”. Let us heed that warning. Let us be aware of how urgent is the task that is entrusted to us. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* has brought new life and hope to the whole ecumenical movement as we come to the close of this second Christian Millennium. We must build on that hope, for here in Europe particularly we are being challenged to renew our efforts to evangelise many who have wandered far from their traditional faith. Our divisions are a great impediment to that task. Our lack of love for one another, brothers and sisters in the one Lord Jesus Christ, destroys the credibility of our preaching the gospel of love. As we give thanks for the progress that we have made, let us realise that the road ahead is still long and difficult, but “so full of joy”, as Pope John Paul II has stated in his Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint on Commitment to Ecumenism* (N° 2). That joy will be ours, and indeed will be shared by many millions of others, if we learn from the experience of Augsburg today how to move forward with open minds and generous hearts “to live by the truth and in love” and so “grow in all ways into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole body is Fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength” (Eph 4:15-16).