

John Paul II
***Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "At the Beginning of the New Millennium"**
6 January 2001

43. To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.

But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to *promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (*Gal 6:2*) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.

44. Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion. How can we forget in the first place those *specific services to communion* which are the *Petrine ministry* and, closely related to it, *episcopal collegiality*? These are realities which have their foundation and substance in Christ's own plan for the Church,²⁸ but which need to be examined constantly in order to ensure that they follow their genuinely evangelical inspiration.

Much has also been done since the Second Vatican Council for the reform of the Roman Curia, the organization of Synods and the functioning of Episcopal Conferences. But there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realize all the potential of these instruments of communion, which are especially appropriate today in view of the need to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times.

45. Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as *the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council*, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative;²⁹ yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them *a priori* in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.

To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God. Significant is Saint Benedict's reminder to the Abbot of a monastery, inviting him to consult even the youngest members of the community: "By the Lord's inspiration, it is often a younger person who knows what is best".³⁰ And Saint Paulinus of Nola urges: "Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes".³¹

While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjustified claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.

The diversity of vocations

46. Such a vision of communion is closely linked to the Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor 12:12*). Therefore, the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.