



1st International Conference
of the Lazarite Academy of Saint Louis IX, King of France
ECUMENISM: MEANING AND PROSPECTS
Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sicily - January 23, 2026



GREETINGS FROM THE GRAND BAILIFF OF SICILY

Excellencies, Authorities, Speakers, Brothers and Sisters, and All Guests!

I would like, first of all, to extend a warm welcome to the 50th Grand Master of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, Don Francisco de Borbón , Graf von Hardenberg, who honours us with his presence for the first time, and to the Bishop of the Church of England, Lindsay Goodall Urwin , who on Sunday, in the splendid setting of the Cathedral of Monreale, will assume the functions of the new Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of the Order, before the tomb of Saint Louis IX, King of France, who was one of the greatest protectors of our Order.

A warm and affectionate greeting to the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of San Giovanni Evangelista, our host, Professor Don Vito Impellizzeri, moderator of the conference, who will become a member of our Order on Sunday, and to the Archbishop of Monreale, Gualtiero Isacchi, Major Chaplain of our Order in Sicily, called today to preside authoritatively over this meeting.

Greetings and sincere thanks to all the speakers who accepted the invitation to engage, in a fraternal and constructive spirit, in this conference organized by our Academy of Saint Louis IX, King of France, on the theme of ecumenism and current perspectives. Thanks to the Rector and the Academy's governing bodies for their dedication to organizing the event.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, wanted to be a "medicine of mercy" and an "updating" to present the Christian message to the modern world, rejecting anathemas and condemnations and with the *Unitatis Redintegratio*, a 1964 conciliar decree, outlined the principles and practices for the pursuit of unity within the Catholic Church. It speaks of Spiritual Ecumenism, defined as the soul of the ecumenical movement, based on conversion of heart, prayer for unity, and holiness of life, in harmony with Christ's prayer for the unity of his disciples. It recognized the "Separated Brethren," acknowledging elements of truth and holiness also present in other Christian Churches, while reaffirming the fullness of the Catholic Church. The importance of theological and historical formation for future priests that takes into account the ecumenical, not polemical, aspect, to build bridges, not walls, was emphasized.

An irreversible commitment: Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* confirmed that Vatican II committed the Catholic Church irreversibly to the ecumenical path.

Vatican II, in essence, transformed ecumenism from a marginal activity to a central commitment of the Catholic Church, focused on dialogue, cooperation, and the recovery of full communion among Christians.

This is the aim of the incessant ecumenical work of Our Order, and this is the purpose of today's meeting, aimed at overcoming the mistrust and prejudices that are still so widespread between and within the various churches, and at identifying common paths that can lead us to visible unity. Let us remember that in countries where Christians are killed and persecuted, they suffer this fate not because they are Catholic, Anglicans, Orthodox, Lutherans, or Reformed, but simply because they are Christians. It is strange and

even singular, if not prophetic, that persecutors are capable of reuniting in faith what we have falsely separated in works.

Let us remember that the evangelical *ut unum sint* is not a simple option for us believers, but a divine commandment that obliges us in full conscience: whoever works to prevent this from happening cannot call himself a Christian and will be called to answer for it before the Lord, Judge of history.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio*: "Many Christian communities present themselves to men as the true inheritance of Jesus Christ; all, indeed, profess to be followers of the Lord, but they differ in attitudes and follow different paths, as if Christ himself were divided. Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the sacred cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature. The Lord of the ages, however, with wisdom and patience, pursues the plan of his grace for us, sinners that we are in the last times. God has begun to bestow more generously among divided Christians remorse for their divisions and the desire for unity. Everywhere, great numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and even among the members of separated Christian communities, a movement, nourished by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is growing daily for the restoration of unity among all Christians."

Thanks again for coming and good luck to everyone.

