



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PATRIARCH OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ETHIOPIA

Castelgandolfo

Saturday, 17 October 1981

Your Holiness,

It is with a heart full of joy that I extend a warm welcome to you, my revered Brother, and to those who accompany you today. The pleasure of receiving you here at Castelgandolfo reawakens all my gratitude for the expressions of sympathy you sent on the occasion of the sad events that afflicted me during this summer.

The close solidarity of so many brethren – itself an expression of Christian brotherhood – together with the prayers that they raised to God, provided an experience of the communion of life which springs from our common baptism and our faith in our one Lord Jesus Christ. I am therefore honoured by your visit and grateful for it.

But my joy becomes greater still as I reflect that this meeting of ours is part of a much wider spiritual movement, that common search among all Christians for growth together towards full unity.

Lack of knowledge of each other's languages, very different historical circumstances, differences of outlook and culture – for these and other reasons our Churches came, as century succeeded century, to live apart. This in turn brought about a further obscuring of our understanding of each other. In calling Catholics to play an active part in the quest for full unity, the Second Vatican Council pointed out the need to form an accurate picture of other Christians as a necessary pre-requisite for full unity. Thus it was that the [Decree on Ecumenism](#) laid particular emphasis on the sacramental reality by which our Churches remain very closely linked, above all in virtue of apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist; it declared explicitly that “through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up

and grows in stature”[1].

The heritage handed down by the Apostles has been lived by our Churches in different forms and ways, and it has had a varied development in accordance with the natural gifts and circumstances of life proper to each[2]. This has also led to different liturgical, disciplinary and theological expressions; in themselves, as long as this variety is complementary rather than contradictory, these different expressions are an enrichment for the life and the mission of the Church among all nations[3]. Hence unity of faith can be clothed with the particular cultural and spiritual contribution of each people and of each local Church.

The contacts which we have re-established are now enabling us to rediscover the profound and true reality of this existing unity. Even the real divergences between us are being seen more clearly as we gradually free them from so many secondary elements that derive from ambiguities of language.

This process requires – and this is indispensable – that we increase our direct contacts and develop our knowledge of each other. Theological conversations and dialogue will make an essential contribution to the clarification and definitive resolution of open questions, with a view to full reconciliation. The Catholic Church is very ready to initiate such direct contacts for the quest for full unity and to do all she can, in harmony with other Churches, to forward this search which corresponds, beyond all doubt, to God’s will for his Church.

In the process towards full unity it is necessary to bring about living contacts between the various communities, and to do this at different levels so as to involve all those who go to make up the varied life of the Church. Truly disinterested and cordial mutual collaboration sustained by common prayer can contribute not only to the obliteration of bitter memories of the past, but also to the consolidation of our present relationship and to its growth towards full unity. In this regard I would assure you of the desire of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia to pray and to work, in a spirit of fraternal love, so as to reach this goal, and, in the mean-while, to experience, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, some of the benefits of Christian unity.

Today the unity of Christians is more urgent than ever, both for the inner life of the Church and for its work of evangelising the modern world. Amidst the present changes mankind is experiencing, a common and united witness of all Christians can be the instrument of a more effective proclamation of the Gospel and also an active contribution to reconciliation among peoples and to the peace of the world.

Your Holiness, as I express the thoughts which are prompted by your welcome presence in Rome, I wish to assure you of my sentiments of brotherhood and solidarity with the whole Church of Ethiopia over which you preside and to state the Catholic Church’s readiness for ever closer contact and for that deeper dialogue which, fostered and sustained by prayer, will contribute to

building up the unity willed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I also greet, in your person, all the people of Ethiopia and offer them my good wishes for a peaceful and constructive society and for fruitful prosperity.

[1] Unitatis Redintegratio, 15.

[2] Cfr. *ibid.* 14.

[3] Cfr. *ibid.* 14-17.

© Copyright 1981 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana