



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MALTA

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VARIOUS CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

*Cathedral of Mdina
Sunday, 27 May 1990*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. It is a particular joy for me to have this opportunity of meeting *members of the various Churches and ecclesial communities* present in Malta. I greet you in the name of our one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I assure you of my gratitude for your presence here this afternoon. We gather as Christians in response to the call of God. The *ecumenical movement*, which is a work not principally of man but of the Holy Spirit, is a grace for the times in which we live. It is a gift for which we may fittingly give thanks and praise to God. Throughout the decades of this century, our eyes have been opened and we see more clearly that the unity of Christians is truly the will of God, and that we are called to cooperate in bringing it about. The search for Christian unity requires us to *rediscover our common heritage* of faith and of moral values. It involves the exercise of a common memory whereby together we appropriate the great truths of faith and expose the wounds of the past to the healing love of our Risen and Glorious Saviour. *Full communion of all people in faith and sacramental life is God's plan for his family.* That plan was revealed in Christ and is becoming progressively clearer to us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church.2. There is a special poignancy in our considering this challenge in the place where we are gathered today. Here in the Cathedral of Mdina, we are in the old city the "Vecchia Città" of Malta. According to popular tradition this Cathedral is built on the site of the palace of Publius, the "protos" of the island, who welcomed Paul of Tarsus when he suffered shipwreck on his way to Rome. The *Acts of the Apostles* recounts: "the island was called Malta. The inhabitants treated us with unusual kindness. They made us welcome and they lit a huge fire because it had started to rain and the weather was cold" (Act. 28, 1-2). The figure of Saint Paul illuminates *the ecumenical and missionary task* that Christians face today. His writings put

vividly before us the central message of the Gospel: that Jesus Christ is our only Saviour and that we find eternal life through faith in him. The work of Christ his saving Death and Resurrection is the centre of our faith. This is the Good News we have all received. It is a message that has been welcomed throughout the ages by the people of Malta. It has inspired them to follow in the footsteps of Saint Paul by proclaiming this Good News in many parts of the world, imitating his courage and zeal, and his willingness to make great sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel. Today, as we approach the third millennium of the Christian era, it is incumbent, upon all of us who have been baptized into Christ to bear strong and ever more united witness to him. The differences which prevent us from enjoying the fullness of unity in faith and sacramental life which is the will of Christ for his followers should not distract us from the wonder of what we have in common: a personal Saviour who died and rose that we might live. *The quest for Christian unity and the call to witness are intimately related.* It should never be thought that missionary endeavour and ecumenical endeavour are somehow in competition, or that one develops at the expense of the other. Our very striving for unity itself bears witness to the healing and reconciling work of God. We seek ever deeper reconciliation with one another so that the world may see more clearly that "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5, 19).³ It is in the context of these reflections that I would take the opportunity of *commending the work of the Catholic Ecumenical Commission*. The Maltese people are almost entirely Catholic and the other Christians mostly come from overseas. Yet the Catholics of Malta have not failed to grasp that "the Catholic Church is committed to the ecumenical movement with an irrevocable decision and desires to contribute to it with all its possibilities" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Patres Cardinales Romanaeque Curiae Praelatos et Officiales coram admissos*, 10, die 28 iun. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 1 [1985] 1999). The responsibility of carrying out this task does not lie only with those countries where there is a strong presence of Orthodox, Anglican, or Protestant Christians alongside the Catholic Church. On the contrary, those countries are in great need of the prayer, interest and support of countries with a large Catholic majority. When another Church or ecclesial community agrees to enter into dialogue with the Catholic Church, it enters into a new relationship with the whole of the Catholic Church. The Ecumenical Commission in Malta, recognizing this fact, has aimed at fostering an ecumenical spirit within the Catholic community. This has in turn created a cordial relationship between Catholics and the other Christians living here. The importance of your local work and of these good relations should not be underestimated.⁴ Dear friends, over nineteen hundred years ago Malta received and warmly welcomed the great bearer of the message of reconciliation: the Apostle Paul. The Maltese received him in kindness and charity and his message has taken root in this land. I urge you all today to welcome once more the message of Paul that "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5, 9). I urge you to enter deeply into the prayer of Christ: "May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Io. 17, 21). To the representatives of *the Muslim community* I express my heartfelt greeting and thank you for your presence. I assure you that the Catholic Church looks to you with sentiments of brotherhood and esteem, trusting that much good in the service of humanity can come from increased understanding and dialogue between us. Indeed, it is important that all believers in the Merciful

and Almighty God should strive together to promote and safeguard, for all mankind, social justice, moral values, peace and an effective and mutually applicable religious freedom (Cfr. Nostra Aetate, 3). Let us all be fervent in prayer and strong in hope. May God who has begun the good work in us bring it to fulfilment. Amen.

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