



# The Holy See

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VISIT OF HIS BEATITUDE TEOCTIST, THE PATRIARCH OF THE ROMENIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH, TO HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II  
AND TO THE CHURCH OF ROME

## ***ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II***

*Saturday, 12 October 2002*

*Your Beatitude and dear Brother,*

1. With great joy I welcome you for this meeting which enables us *to greet one another in a new way with the kiss of love* (cf. I Pt 5,14), prior to finding ourselves together before the Lord, tomorrow, during the Eucharistic Liturgy in St Peter's Basilica. Our meeting today offers us the opportunity for a more direct and personal exchange and gives concrete form to a promise: to continue together, as we have in the past few days, to *tend the flock that God has entrusted to us by being examples to the flock* (cf. *ibid*, n. 5,2-3), so that it will follow us with docility *along the difficult path, but so full of joy, of unity and communion* (cf. Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 2).

On this joyful occasion, with gratitude I think back to the time of the Second Vatican Council, in which I took part as Pastor of Kraków. In the discussions during the Council sessions on the mystery of the Church, we could not avoid noticing with regret the division between the venerable Eastern Churches and Rome, which had lasted for almost a millennium, just as it clearly appeared that many centuries of incomprehension and misunderstandings on both sides had given rise to injustices and a lack of love. When he was Apostolic Delegate in Sofia and in Constantinople, Pope John XXIII had already laid the foundations for deeper understanding and greater mutual respect.

2. The Council rediscovered that the rich spiritual, liturgical, disciplinary and theological tradition of the Churches of the East belongs to the common heritage of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 16). It also stressed the need to preserve with these Churches

the fraternal relations that should exist between local Churches, as between Sister Churches (cf. *ibid.*, n. 14).

At the conclusion of the work of the Council, by a highly significant gesture that took place at the same time in Rome and in Constantinople, the reciprocal condemnations of 1054 were cancelled from the memory of the Church. Between my Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, at that time an unforgettable meeting had already taken place and an important exchange of Letters was already underway between them, justly known as *Tomos agapis* (the dialogue of love).

Since then, our communion, and I think I can say, our friendship, has been deepened through a reciprocal exchange of visits and messages. I am happy to recall the first visit Your Beatitude made to Rome in 1989, and my journey to Bucharest three years ago in 1999. As time passed, the fruitful exchange between our Churches has also been achieved at other levels: between bishops, theologians, priests and students. In 1980 a Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as a whole was set up and has been able to draft and publish a number of documents. These are texts in which appear the full extent of our communion of faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, the sacraments, the priesthood and the episcopal ministry in apostolic succession. It is to be hoped that the Commission will resume its work as soon as possible, since its role is of primary importance.

3. Deeply grateful to the Lord for all that we have been able to achieve together, however, we cannot deny the appearance of certain difficulties on our common path. In the years 1989-90, after 40 years of Communist dictatorship, Eastern Europe was once again able to enjoy freedom. The Eastern Churches in full communion with the See of Peter, who had been harshly persecuted and brutally repressed, also rediscovered their place in public life.

This gave rise to tensions which, we hope, may be overcome by a spirit of justice and of love. The peace of the Church is so great a good that each one must be prepared to make sacrifices to achieve it. We are fully confident that you yourself, Your Beatitude, will know how to plead the cause of peace with intelligence, wisdom and love. In following this route, many witnesses who in different times and places have given a shining example, will come to our help and will accompany us.

4. While, with sentiments of deep gratitude, I turn my gaze to the path on which the Spirit of God has guided us in the course of past decades, I feel the question rising up within me: how should we continue? What could our next steps be in order at last to reach full communion? It is certain that we must continue in the future on the common path of the dialogue of truth and love.

Continuing the dialogue of truth means trying to illuminate and to overcome the differences that still remain by increasing our exchanges and reflections on the theological level. The goal is, in the

light of the sublime model of the Holy Trinity, to reach a unity which implies neither absorption nor fusion (cf. Encyclical *Slavorum apostoli*, n. 27), but respects the legitimate difference between the different traditions, for they are an integral part of the Church's treasure.

We have the principles of conduct that have been formulated in the common texts, and which, for the Catholic Church, are still valid. We too are concerned by the proselytism of new communities or religious movements, which have no roots in history and are invading countries and regions where the traditional Churches are present and where the Gospel has been preached for centuries. The Catholic Church is also having this sad experience in various parts of the world.

For her part, the Catholic Church recognises the mission which the Orthodox Churches are called to carry out in the countries where they have been rooted for centuries. She desires nothing else than to help this mission and collaborate with it, as well as to be able to carry out her own pastoral task for her faithful and for those who turn freely to her. To strengthen this attitude, the Catholic Church has sought to sustain and to assist the mission of the Orthodox Churches in their native countries, and the pastoral activity of many communities living side by side in the diaspora with Catholic communities. However, where problems or misunderstandings arise, it is necessary to face them by means of a fraternal and frank dialogue, seeking solutions that can involve the two parties reciprocally. The Catholic Church is always available for such a dialogue so as to bear an ever more credible Christian witness together.

Persevering in the dialogue of love means continuing to promote personal exchanges and meetings between bishops, priests and laity, between monastic centres and theology students. Yes, I think we should encourage meetings between young people above all, for they are always curious to know worlds that are different from their own, to open themselves to broader dimensions.

Therefore our duty is to uproot old prejudices and to pave the way for a new future founded on mutually offered peace.

5. Another aspect interests me. I ask myself if our relations have become sufficiently deep and mature to enable us, with God's grace, to give them a solid institutional structure, in such a way as also to find stable forms of communication and a regular, reciprocal exchange of information with each of the Orthodox Churches, and at the level of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as a whole. I would be happy if this matter could be the subject of a serious reflection in future dialogues, and if some might suggest some constructive solutions in this regard.

We are conscious that we are only humble instruments in God's hands. The Spirit of God alone can give us full communion. That is why it is important to pray with ever greater intensity that he may grant us peace and unity. With Mary and the Apostles, let us gather and pray for the coming of the Spirit of love and unity. Let us continue our common pilgrimage towards visible unity, in the

certitude that God is guiding our footsteps.

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Address of His Beatitude Teoctist

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