



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO A DELEGATION OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

Saturday, 23 June 1979

My dear Brothers in Christ,

IT IS WITH JOY that I greet you, distinguished guests and worthy delegates of my brother, His Holiness the Patriarch of Alexandria, Pope Shenouda III. I am grateful for his having sent you and for the warm words of greeting and brotherly love he has addressed to me through you. They are a source of comfort and encouragement.

How marvellous are the ways of the Lord! He permits us to profess today our common faith in Jesus Christ, His divine Son, true God and true Man, who died and rose again and through His Holy Spirit lives in and guides His Church, the body of which He is the head. We rejoice together that the doubts and suspicions of the past have been overcome so that with full hearts we can proclaim together once again this fundamental truth of our Christian faith.

From the very first days of my election as Bishop of Rome I have considered as one of my principal tasks that of striving to bring about the unity of all those who bear the holy name of Christian. The scandal of division must be resolutely overcome, so that we may all fulfil in the lives of our Churches and in our service to the world the prayer of the Lord of the Church "that all may be one". I have stressed this on a number of occasions already. I repeat it to you now, since what is involved here is the communion between two apostolic Churches such as ours.

I know that one of the fundamental questions of the ecumenical movement is the nature of that full communion we are seeking with each other and the role that the Bishop of Rome has to play, by God's design, in serving that communion of faith and spiritual life, which is nourished by the sacraments and expressed in fraternal charity. A great deal of progress has been made in deepening our understanding of this question. Much remains to be done. I consider your visit to

me and to the See of Rome a significant contribution towards resolving this question definitively.

The Catholic Church bases its dialogue of truth and charity with the Coptic Orthodox Church on the principles proclaimed by the [Second Vatican Council](#), especially in the Constitution on the Church, "[Lumen Gentium](#)" and the Decree on Ecumenism, "[Unitatis Redintegratio](#)". I am happy to make my own the statements of the Common Declaration signed by my venerated predecessor [Pope Paul VI](#) with Pope Shenouda III in 1973 and the further encouragement the Holy See has given to this dialogue since that time.

Fundamental to this dialogue is the recognition that the richness of this unity in faith and spiritual life has to be expressed in diversity of forms. Unity – whether on the universal level or the local level – does not mean uniformity or absorption of one group by another. It is rather at the service of all groups to help each live better the proper gifts it has received from God's Spirit. This is an encouragement to move ahead with confidence and reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever may be the bitterness inherited from the past, whatever may be the present doubts and tensions that may exist, the Lord calls us to move forward in mutual trust and in mutual love. If true unity is to be achieved, it will be the result of cooperation among pastors on the local level, of the collaboration at all levels of the life of our Churches so that our people may grow in understanding of each other, in trust and love of each other. With no one trying to dominate each other but to serve each other, all together will grow into that perfection of unity for which Our Lord prayed on the night before he died^[1] and for which the Apostle Paul exhorted us to work with all diligence^[2].

Again, my thanks for your coming. My thoughts and prayers go to my brother Pope Shenouda III, to the bishops, clergy and faithful of your Church, as together with my brothers the bishops and the faithful of the Catholic Churches in Egypt you pray and work for full ecclesial communion which will be God's gift to all of us.

[1] *Io.* 17.

[2] *Eph.* 4, 11-13.

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