

## VISIT TO ROME OF PATRIARCH PARTHENIOS III OF ALEXANDRIA

September 24, 1990

*His Beatitude Parthenios III, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, paid a visit to the Holy Father on Monday 24 September 1990. He was accompanied by Metropolitan Paul of Johannesburg and Bishop Theodore of Cyrene.*

*The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria was an active member of the Catholic-Orthodox Joint Theological Commission from its establishment in 1979 until his election as Patriarch in 1987.*

*We publish below the texts of the speeches which the Holy Father and Patriarch Parthenios III exchanged at the end of a private meeting they had together in the papal residence at Castelgandolfo.*

### THE POPE'S ADDRESS

Your Beatitude,

You are here for a few hours as a pilgrim at the tombs of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the guest of the Church of Rome and her Bishop, the Successor of Peter. I thank you for your visit and with all my heart I bid you welcome.

I am truly happy to welcome you and to speak personally with you. For many years you have been labouring with great charity and much energy for the holy cause of Christian unity. You know that, as Bishop of Rome, I realize that I have a special and unique duty to give service to this cause which Christ prayed for on the eve of his Passion. To the sacramental brotherhood which unites us in the same episcopal ordination and the feelings of love which I have for you, there is also an added kinship of heart which creates an undying trust and hope between us.

Since the creation of the Mixed Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, you have been a particularly active and dedicated member. Today, as the Patriarch of your Church, you are a faithful and determined leader in it. By God's grace, this commission has already produced results regarding the Church's common way of thinking about the sacraments, the relationship between faith and sacraments, and the apostolic succession which is fundamental for the sanctification and unity of the People of God. In welcoming this progress in theological thought with thanksgiving, we should spare no effort that it may have an influence on the concrete behaviour of our communities. There is no lack of occasions for Catholics and the Orthodox of the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria to bear witness to what already unites them and to work together to serve the peoples in whose midst they live in the Middle East and in various African countries.

In the process of reestablishing complete organic communion between us, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church also encounter difficulties which are not limited to the field of theology. I am convinced of it, and I have already had occasion to say it: only dialogue nourished by prayer and lived in charity will permit us to overcome them. More than ever, we must make our own St Paul's exhortation to the Romans: "Love one another with the affection of brothers. Anticipate each other in showing respect. Do not grow slack, but be fervent in spirit; He whom you serve is the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient under trial, persevere in prayer" (Rm 12:10-12).

Your Beatitude, not only in dialogue with the Catholic Church, but also within Orthodoxy and in international and regional ecumenical organizations you give tireless testimony to your hope for unity and you also seek opportunities for dialogue with believers of other religions and all people of good will. You know how, in my ministry in Rome and throughout my pastoral visits to various parts of the world, I pursue the same goals so that humanity may know its Lord, accept His Gospel and enjoy peace and eternal salvation.

Your Church is less numerous today but, for the Lord and for us, a Church is not great because of the number of her faithful, but because of the liveliness of her faith, her missionary zeal and the witness of her saints and martyrs. With sincere love through you I also greet and welcome in prayer and spirit the bishops, clergy and all the faithful of the Sister-Church of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. Our meeting today is truly a meeting in the love of Christ, and I am pleased to end this fraternal message by citing the great Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople: "We also turn our thoughts to the great and holy moment when the Bishops of East and West, celebrating at the same altar, shall raise the Lord's cup in a common Eucharist. That hour may be long in coming, but the hour of love is already here. This is it" (*Tomos Agapis*, 26 October 1967, n. 193, p. 441).

ORE, Oct. 8, 1990

### THE PATRIARCH'S ADDRESS

My beloved brother,

With fraternal love I have come to visit you, the venerable Primate of the Roman Catholic Church, our sister Church, accompanied by my dear brothers, Metropolitan Paul of Johannesburg and Bishop Theodore of Cyrene.

I give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ our God, who has given us the joy of meeting one another. Our two sister Churches of Rome and Alexandria are among the ancient, historical, traditional Churches of the first centuries, of the Alpha of the history of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which was born immediately after Pentecost, of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and of the holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark. All of us are part of the flock of the Good Shepherd, you my beloved brother with a large flock and I, today, with only a little one. This is the holy will of our Lord.

From the very beginning we traveled down a common path, both of us engaged in spiritual struggles which continue today, and will endure to the end of time. Fully united in the first centuries, we have lived through our history by the Lord's grace, living with the people of God, and we have been his Body down through the centuries. We have had holy martyrs, mothers, fathers, young men and women, children, since the beginning of the life of the Church of our Christ.

We have encountered one another in spirit, and we have met in the life of this world and we have come to know one another. We love one another, and together we confess our Lord.

In our history, Saint Athanasius the Great, the Patriarch of Alexandria, knew the love and affection of his brother Pope Julius I, and Patriarch Peter II of Alexandria experienced that of Pope Damasus. They came to stay with you during difficult moments in the Church's life, and, in their endeavor to preserve the truth in the Church, they found brothers in Rome who both preserved love and faith, and struggled for them. Through the centuries our Church has taken note of these meetings, and has drawn strength and life from them. And she keeps hoping. St. Paul the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Romans, to your faithful, wrote: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (*Rm* 15:7). This is what we experience in moments such as these.

The communion of brothers is a symbol of life in the progression of the holy Churches towards stability, and the union of all. We have a holy duty, in love and humility, to meet with one another, to get to know one another, not to isolate ourselves, but to be companions, friends, brothers. We must have the "desire to come" together as brothers (*Rm* 15:23), "with joy", "by God's will" (*Rm* 15:32).

Thanks be to God, the encounters between our Churches in this century, our dialogue, have helped us to "be together in the same place", in His name, thanks to the blessed resolution and the holy courage of Athenagoras I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, and Paul VI, the Pope of Rome, of pious memory.

Difficulties exist, and are still coming to light at this time. Our obligation is immense. With love, sacrifice and renunciation, we must not separate ourselves from his love for his people, his Church (cf. *Rm* 8:31). This is our debt towards the sacrifice of our Christ.

We are human beings, and we bear our history which "comes from this world" in all its aspects. These are holy but also include our mistakes and, above all, our sin. At this difficult time, Christ gives us within his Church the possibility in freedom to repent and engage in holy combat. We have the obligation, for the sake of the unity of all, to overcome our errors, to forget them. Now at the end of our century, we are living through great moments in the history of our Church. In central and eastern Europe, in the Middle East, at the holy places of our Christ. There is a crisis. We must remain faithful to the great duty of love for the Church, for the people. The pastors, servants of love and truth, must care for the flock and lead it "down the path of salvation", with the holy weapons "of righteousness for the right hand and for the left... as servants of God we have recommended ourselves in every way... through great endurance... so that no fault may be found with our ministry" (2 *Cor* 6:1-10).

Our meetings and dialogue must continue with courage, resolution, and sacrifice. And we must continue to struggle in a responsible way for peace and justice in our Churches and in the world.

May our path towards the twenty-first century be the path of unity, of reconciliation of all, of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church for all and through all, and for the entire world.

From the bottom of my heart I thank you, beloved brother, for the affection and kindness you showed in remembering me on the day of my enthronization by the presence of your beloved delegate, the Archbishop Mariano Magrassi of Bari, and those who accompanied him. May our God keep you always "in good health, and give you long life, so that you may teach the truth of your Christ".

24 September 1990.