

MEETING OF POPE JOHN PAUL II AND HIS BEATITUDE
TEOCTIST, PATRIARCH OF ROMANIA

October 12, 2002

ADDRESS OF PATRIARCH TEOCTIST

Your Holiness,
Your Eminences,

“*Deep is calling on deep in the roar of the waters*” (Ps 41 [42], 8). With these words the king and poet David spoke when he proclaimed the divine wisdom, he who was filled with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Guided by this truth and seeking to make a great deal of it, we observe that the love God has sown in us, who are his ministers, produces love; that is what draws us close to one another and reveals the mystery of our service and of our common growth in Christ the Lord. We have equally been filled with the riches of this source of love when we met in Bucharest and now here when we are surrounded by our collaborators in the daily service of the Church of Christ.

In drawing from the same source, I express my gratitude for your invitation that offers me the chance to share with you my concerns about the permanent service to which the Holy Spirit has called us now that we are at the beginning of the third millennium.

Holiness,

When the period of atheist totalitarianism was over, one of the principal concerns of our Church was to rediscover and put into practice the Christian mission in present day society, and especially, the catechesis of adults by means of an education and an active and conscious participation in the liturgical and social life of the Church. After a long period of strict limitation, repression, and control of every activity of the profession of Christian faith outside church and the implication of that situation on social life, the endeavour is not easy. But with the help of God, the efforts made in this period of rebirth have begun to bear fruit.

Today the Church is confronted with new problems, by comparison with those of the past, which supposes that she find new ways to make the message of the Gospel of Christ to be heard, followed and lived in our contemporary world. Traditional Christian moral values must oppose the promotion of pseudo-values often so contrary to the Gospel. Religious indifference and the attempt to drive religious faith from the sphere of public life and to transform it into a private and personal question is always gaining ground. These are the phenomena of watering down and relativization of the apostolic faith in

Christ who is the same “yesterday, today and for ever” (Heb 13:8); phenomena that become more and more present in the life of modern man. More often religious faith is replaced by other syncretist systems of belief that seek to satisfy certain particular needs of certain persons and groups. On the social level, the phenomenon of globalization is felt very acutely especially in countries that have been freed from the communist yoke. The values that define and showed their validity throughout the course of our two-thousand-year history are threatened, subject to attack or to perfidious relativization. In this context, the number of those who live below the poverty line continues to grow to an alarming extent. More still than in the past, people today expect that the Church will make her voice heard on these questions and that she will proclaim to the world the values of the Gospel of Christ in presenting them to confront the new challenges of the modern world.

In the sector of missionary activity, we are all conscious that these new realities do not concern one Church or religious confession, but in the same way all Christians. Consequently, if in the past in missionary activity one put the accent on the promotion and defence of confessional identity, today the need for a common witness of all Christians appears with greater force. If, in their efforts to survive the Communist period, the churches were able to join their efforts, today the unity of the witness to the Gospel of Christ becomes ever more necessary so that it will have the desired impact on society and “that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). In this regard our church has remained faithful to the ecumenical opening and to collaboration among Christians that aims at rediscovering the unity of all Christians.

Unfortunately the contemporary spirit shaped by globalization and by competition can be found even in the relations between Christians. Without taking into account the existence of local churches, who, at the moment of the harsh persecutions, kept alive the flame of faith with their sacrifices, groups of would-be evangelizers have assailed our faithful, considering our territories as spiritually “empty” or missionary territory (*terrae missionis*) in which the Gospel has not been proclaimed. Naturally, such attitudes have provoked among us a great deal of frustration and suffering. The hope of help from the churches in free countries with the goal of giving a new missionary vigour and of reinforcing the local churches of these lands was quickly transformed into disillusionment, confusion and attitudes that are sporadically anti-ecumenical. The historical churches in the territory have been forced to face tactics of disloyal competition with parallel ecclesial structures established by certain churches from whom we expected fraternal assistance.

Despite this sad reality the Orthodox Church of Romania has remained faithful to collaboration with other Christians and continues to bring her specific contribution to the efforts of the bilateral and multi-lateral ecumenical dialogue. On the local level, for a few years, projects of ecumenical collaboration have been developed and we are determined to strengthen and multiply them in the future. We are faithful to ecumenical openness because the common witness of Christians is not a momentary necessity to make the Gospel living and active in the world today. It is the vocation of all Christians, a commandment that expresses the will of Christ, Head of the Church, "that all may be one" on the foundation of the profession of faith of the Apostles and of the witness of the cloud of saints throughout history (cf. *Heb 12:1*). To realize this vocation, we have both the Scriptural and traditional foundation of the Orthodox Church, the panorthodox decisions taken through the centuries, and the converging principles formulated in the ecumenical documents about common witness and in cooperation between Christians.

I would like to repeat briefly some of the principles that the Orthodox Church of Romania has established as a priority in promoting of her ecumenical mission.

The witness given to Christ is substantially linked to the common belonging to the body of the Church and to Christian identity as bearer of the Spirit temple of the Holy Spirit. The Christian becomes "witness" (cf. *Acts 1:8*) by his participation in the grace of the Holy Spirit and his incorporation into the Body of Christ through the sacraments.

In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol of faith, the synthesis of the ecumenical expression of the Christian faith, the article on the Church: "*I believe in the one, holy, catholic (soborniceasca) and apostolic Church*" is as important as the other articles of faith of the *Creed*. For this reason the quest for the full unity of the Church is a vocation and a duty for all together and for each one individually.

The authentic common Christian witness avoids any clear or hidden manifestation of proselytism as well as disloyal confessional competition. Proselytism is a counter-witness and must be denounced as such in every circumstance (There are many documents drawn up on this theme in the context of ecumenical relations. These documents are points of reference for the ecumenical cooperation among Christians [See the documents of the World Council of Churches: Christian witness, Proselytism and Religious Freedom (New Delhi, 1961) and Towards a Common Witness. An Appeal to Establish Responsible Relations in the Mission and to renounce Proselytism (Geneva 1997). There are documents drawn up by the Mixed Working Group between the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Catholic Church: Common witness and proselytism (1970); Common witness (1982); and The Challenge of proselytism and the Appeal for a Common Witness (1995). One must pay special attention to the Common Declaration of Balamand of 1993, drawn

up by the International Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church]. The documents that have been drawn up on the question of proselytism are particularly eloquent. We only need to put them into practice in the sphere of today's realities and in a peaceful spirit.

The mission in a particular place is the responsibility of the local church inasmuch as it is in fact the expression of the catholicity (*sobornicitadi*) of the universal church. Other churches coming from other places are welcome to assist in the missionary activity of the Church, but only alongside of and in full cooperation with the local church. This principle of convergence adopted in the context of the ecumenical dialogue has a more obligatory character for the historical traditional churches like the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches because it is equally confirmed by the canons of the undivided Church of the first millennium. The principle of "canonical territory" which does not flow from a purely legalistic desire to resolve a temporary historical problem but from a profoundly ecclesiological foundation, maintains its own value and importance even today (cf. Apostolic canon n. 35, canon n. 2 of the Second Ecumenical Synod; canon n. 8 of the Third Ecumenical Synod; canon n. 20 of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, etc.).

To denounce proselytism and disloyal confessional competition is not to contravene the principle of religious liberty and the freedom of conscience of the person as it appeals in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" but on the contrary it affirms it.

Common witness and fraternal relations between Christians are a true act of *kenosis*. This implies efforts to be healed reciprocally from the wounds of the past and to establish relations on new bases, relations which take into account the era in which we live and which are marked by a sincere and open dialogue between persons and communities who desire to create fresh ecumenical relations.

Your Holiness,
Your Eminences,

Despite all the difficulties and all the problems that our churches have to face in the contemporary world, I would like to conclude with a thought that is positive and full of hope for the future. Both our common evangelical *Creed* and today's realities call our churches to undertake much more sustained efforts to offer a common witness to the world today. The bases for such a collaboration that aims at realizing a deeper communion already exist. All each of us must do is struggle to put them into practice.

Let us beg God, who is good and benevolent, that our presence here, as representatives of an ancient church and ancient Christian people may constitute a step forward in the accomplishing this divine commandment.

ORE, October 16, 2002