



THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN UNITY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SYNOD
OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF BULGARIA
Monday, 26 May 2003

Your Eminence,
Venerable Metropolitans and Bishops,
Dear Loved Ones in the Lord,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1: 2).

With sentiments of joy I address to you the greeting that the Apostle Paul repeated so often, evoking in your presence the name of God, the Father of glory, who enlightens the eyes of our hearts to make us understand the "hope" to which he has called us in Christ, and the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his "power" (cf. Eph 1: 17-19).

I thank Metropolitan Kalinik for his cordial words on behalf of the entire Delegation. I greet Cardinal Walter Kasper and the Catholic Bishops who accompany him.

Our meeting today truly calls us to hope. We perceive with grateful hearts the effective power of the One to whom all things are possible, despite the human obstacles to the free outpouring of his grace. We feel a growing desire for deeper communion with one another, and we discern more clearly the road that lies before us.

Our hope is especially well founded, because we are not meeting for the first time but rather we meet again, a year after my visit to Sofia. On 24 May last year, in the Patriarchal Palace, I had the joy of talking to His Beatitude Maxim for the first time. It was a brotherly meeting which had the momentum to inspire others. It was as if distances were diminished and brothers better acquainted.

The right context was created for the growth of reciprocal confidence which is the prerequisite for understanding, peaceful coexistence and communion.

2. I will never be able to forget my visit to your land! Please convey to His Beatitude Maxim my heartfelt remembrance which is fostered in prayer; I ask you to tell him once again of my spiritual closeness in the desire that the full unity of Catholic and Orthodox Christians become reality as soon as possible. I also add my warmest good wishes, a few days after the solemn celebrations in Sofia to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the re-establishment of the Patriarchate.

In their task at the beginning of this new millennium, His Beatitude Maxim, the Orthodox Church and her Holy Synod have a weighty burden of responsibility. While Bulgaria is also opening to the new, aspiring to join the enlarged Europe, it must revive that rich patrimony of faith and culture which the Church and the Bulgarian nation share, and which constitutes the miracle of the work of evangelization carried out by the two holy Brothers of Salonika, Cyril and Methodius, whose inheritance, after eleven centuries of Christianity among the Slavs, is and remains for them deeper and stronger than any division (cf. Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, n. 25).

3. By presenting anew in a language better suited to the new generations the contribution of Cyril and Methodius, a means of unification of peoples who differed from one another, the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria can in turn renew the evangelical foresight of the Holy Brothers, forcefully and by direct experience; they believed that the different living conditions of individual Christian Churches can never justify discord, dissent or injury in the profession of the one faith and the practice of charity (cf. *ibid.*, n. 11). Not long before his death here in Rome, Cyril, as we read in his *Vita Constantini*, addressed these words to the Lord: "Make them, O Lord, a chosen people, of one mind in the true faith and the authentic doctrine; make your Church grow in number, and gather all her members into unity".

This message of faith, so deeply rooted in your culture and in your being Church, is and remains the goal to strive for so that the Christian East and West may be fully united and together make the plenitude of the catholicity of the Church shine forth.

Dear Brothers! Your Delegation is here in Rome for several reasons. First of all, the date of your visit coincides with that of the Feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius, according to the calendar in use in Bulgaria. You also want to commemorate the first anniversary of my Visit to Sofia and my unforgettable meeting with His Beatitude Maxim. Thank you for this sign of solicitude and fraternal appreciation!

4. You have also come to Rome for a very joyful event: the liturgical inauguration of the Church of Sts Vincent and Anastasius by the Trevi Fountain. The prayer meeting on Saturday, 24 May, was very solemn due to the presence of so many distinguished members of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, of H.E. Mr Simeone di Sassonia Coburgo-Gotha, Prime Minister of the Government of Bulgaria, as well as various

representatives of the Holy See and the Vicariate of Rome led by my representative, Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. I know that the Community and its Rector pro tempore have been fraternally welcomed in the Church of Sts Vincent and Anastasius, which has also been adapted for the liturgical and pastoral service of Orthodox Bulgarian residents in Rome. It is a significant example of the ecclesial sharing here in Rome which I have so much at heart.

5. Indeed, if we want to progress on the path of renewed communion, we must follow in the footsteps of Sts Cyril and Methodius, who were able to win "the recognition and trust of the Roman Pontiffs, the Patriarchs of Constantinople, of Byzantine Emperors and various Princes of the young Slav peoples" (Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, n. 7). This shows that diversity does not always give rise to friction.

An experience of fraternal sharing marked by the reciprocal respect of our legitimate differences can be an encouragement to know one another better and to collaborate also in other contexts and circumstances, each time the opportunity arises. May this be a good omen for our relations in the future! I thank the Lord and I ask him to bless our steps on the path we have undertaken.

I cordially thank you for your visit. Please assure His Beatitude Maxim of my constant remembrance to the Lord. May God bless him, all of you and the beloved people of Bulgaria.