



## THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

### COMMON DECLARATION OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II AND HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH TEOCTIST

"The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"  
(Jn 17,22-23)

In the deep joy of being together again in the city of Rome, close to the tombs of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, we exchange the kiss of peace under the gaze of the One who watches over his Church and guides our steps; and we meditate anew on these words, which the Evangelist John transmitted to us and which constitute Christ's heartfelt prayer on the eve of his Passion.

1. Our meeting takes place in continuity with the embrace we exchanged in Bucharest in May 1999, while still resounding in our hearts is the moving appeal "Unitate, unitate! Unity, unity!", that a great crowd of faithful spontaneously raised on that occasion when they saw us. This appeal is the echo of our Lord's prayer that "they may all be one" (Jn 17,21).

Today's meeting reinforces our dedication to pray and to work to achieve the full and visible unity of all the disciples of Christ. Our aim and our ardent desire is full communion, which is not absorption but communion in truth and love. It is an irreversible journey for which there is no alternative: it is the path of the Church.

2. Still marked by the sad historical period during which people denied the Name and Lordship of the Redeemer, even today Christian communities in Romania often have difficulty in surmounting the negative effects those years have had on the practice of fraternity and sharing, and on the quest for communion. Our meeting must be taken as an example: brothers must meet to be reconciled, to reflect together, to find the means to achieve mutual understanding, to expound and to explain each other's differences. We therefore urge those who are called to live side by side in the same land of Romania, to find solutions of justice and charity. By means of a sincere dialogue, we must overcome the conflicts, misunderstandings and suspicions coming from the past so that in this decisive period of their history Christians in Romania can be witnesses of peace and reconciliation.

3. Our relations must reflect the real and profound communion in Christ, that already exists between us, even if it is not yet full. In fact, we recognize with joy that we possess together the tradition of the undivided Church centred on the mystery of the Eucharist, to which the saints we have in common in our calendars bear witness. Moreover, the many witnesses of the faith who showed their fidelity to Christ in the times of oppression and persecution in the last century are a seed of hope in our present difficulties.

In order to promote the quest for full communion, even with the doctrinal differences that still remain, it is appropriate to find concrete means by setting up regular consultations, with the conviction that no difficult situation is destined to remain beyond redress, and that thanks to the attitude of listening and dialogue and the regular exchange of information, satisfactory solutions can be found to straighten out points of friction and reach equitable solutions for concrete problems.

We should reinforce this process so that the full truth of the faith becomes a common patrimony, shared by both sides, that can give birth to a truly peaceful conviviality, rooted in and founded in charity.

We know well how to behave to establish the orientations that must guide the work of evangelization so necessary after the sombre period of State atheism. We agree to recognize the religious and cultural traditions of each people, and religious freedom as well.

Evangelization cannot be based on a spirit of competition, but on reciprocal respect and cooperation which recognize the freedom of each person to live according to his own convictions in respect for his religious belonging.

4. In the development of our contacts, starting with the Pan-Orthodox Conferences and the Second Vatican Council, we have been the witnesses of a promising reconciliation between East and West, based on prayer and on a dialogue of charity and of truth, which has had many moments of profound communion. This is why we look with concern at the current difficulties that beset the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and, on the occasion of our meeting, we desire to express the hope that no initiative will be neglected that can reactivate the theological dialogue and relaunch the activity of the commission. We have the duty to do so, for theological dialogue makes stronger the affirmation of our shared will for communion over against the present situation of division.

5. The Church is not a reality closed in on herself: she is sent to the world and she is open to the world. The new possibilities that are being created in an already united Europe that is in the process of extending its frontiers to associate the peoples and cultures of the Central and Eastern parts of the continent, are a challenge that

the Christians of East and West must face together. The more the latter are united in their witness to the one Lord, the more they will contribute to giving voice, consistency and space to the Christian soul of Europe, to respect for life, to the dignity and the fundamental rights of the human person, to justice and to solidarity, to peace, to reconciliation, to the values of the family and to the protection of creation. Europe in its entirety needs the cultural richness forged by Christianity.

The Orthodox Church of Romania, the centre of contacts and exchanges between the fruitful Slav and Byzantine traditions of the East, and the Church of Rome who in her Latin element, evokes the Western voice of the one Church of Christ, must contribute together to a task that belongs to the third millennium. In accord with the traditional beautiful expression, the particular Churches like to call one another "Sister Churches". To be open to this dimension means collaborating to restore to Europe its deepest ethos and its truly human face. With these perspectives and these dispositions, together we entrust ourselves to the Lord, imploring him to make us worthy of building the Body of Christ, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4,13).

Vatican, 12 October 2002

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