



The Holy See

**MEETING OF JOHN PAUL II
WITH MAR IGNAZIO YACOUB III,
ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH**

Wednesday, 14 May 1980

*Your Holiness,
Dear Brothers in Christ,*

With joy in the Lord I greet you and bid you welcome. It is a pleasure to receive the chief pastor and the distinguished representatives of a Church which sees its roots in the Apostolic community of Antioch, where the followers of the Risen Lord Jesus first received the glorious name of Christian^[1] .

Our love of that same Risen Lord, our devotion to that apostolic faith and the Christian witness received from our Fathers is what makes our meeting today so full of meaning. Together we repeat the inspired words of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"^[2]. Together we confess the mystery of the Word of God, made man for our salvation, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature^[3], in whom it has pleased the Father to re-establish all things^[4].

This is the Lord we proclaim; this is the Lord we seek to serve, in fidelity and truth; this is the Lord whose Spirit impels us to search with ever greater zeal for the fullness of communion with each other.

By baptism we are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. The priesthood and the Eucharist which we share because of the apostolic succession bind us even closer together. The world in which we live and for which Christ gave himself as a ransom for many has need of a united Christian witness in order to be able to hear his word better and respond to his message of love and reconciliation.

Yes, his is a message, or rather an urgent appeal for reconciliation among those who bear his name.

For centuries we have been estranged from each other; misunderstanding and mistrust have often marked our relationships. By God's grace we are seeking to overcome that past.

Nine years ago, Your Holiness and my revered predecessor Paul VI met in this very place to give clear testimony to a mutual dedication to this task of Christian reconciliation. At that time you recognized that, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen because of the different theological expressions which have been used to express our faith in the Word of God made flesh and become really man, the faith we intend to proclaim is the same. In words that were both encouraging and prophetic you said together: "The period of mutual recrimination and condemnation has given place to a willingness to meet together in sincere efforts to lighten and eventually remove the burden of history which still weighs heavily upon Christians"[5].

These words have not remained simple expressions of good intentions. In the framework of the "Pro Oriente" meetings between representatives of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, theologians from both our Churches have searched into and sought to resolve questions which still cause some difference among us and prevent full canonical and Eucharistic communion. Some of the distinguished bishops present today have taken an active part in these conversation. We are grateful to God and to all these devoted men for the real progress which has been made.

On the level of pastoral care for Christian emigrants there has been fruitful cooperation for disinterested service towards those who, in search of an improvement of the material conditions of their lives, feel the deep need of spiritual support in their new surroundings. I would also like to express my personal appreciation for the delegation Your Holiness sent on the occasion of my election as Bishop of Rome.

As we humbly acknowledge God's blessings on our endeavours, especially during the past nine years, we are confident that, if we remain open to the inspirations of the Spirit, God will continue to favour us with his blessing.

Your Holiness, we meet together just after my return from an intensive journey in Africa, a journey filled with many precious experiences. This is not the moment for making extended comments on these experiences. One thing is clear, though. I am more than ever convinced that the world in which we live hungers and thirsts for God, a longing that can be fulfilled only in Christ. As pastors of Churches sharing in apostolic traditions, we are called upon in a special way to carry on the apostolic mission of bringing Christ and his gifts of salvation and love to our generation. Our disunity is an obstacle to fulfilling this mission. Our disunity obscures the voice of the Spirit who is striving to speak to mankind through our voices. But our meeting today is a sign of our renewed desire to be more attuned to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Encouraged by what the

Lord has already accomplished in us and through us, we look forward in hope to the future, not minimizing the difficulties but putting our firm trust in him who said “Behold I am making all things new”.

[1] Cf. *Acts* 11:26.

[2] *Mt* 16:16.

[3] Cf. *Col* 1:15.

[4] Cf. *Eph* 1:10.

[5] Cf. Common Declaration of 27 October 1971.

[6] *Rev* 21:15.

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