



The Holy See

FIRST MEETING OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI WITH HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH AMBA SHENOUDA III

Saturday 5, May 1973

Dear Brother in Christ,

The words you have addressed to us have been particularly moving ones. We are truly happy to welcome Your Holiness to our home. From the day of your elevation to your position as Father and Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, God has granted us the grace to maintain frequent relations through letters and through the ministry of our representatives. Now we have this opportunity to meet face to face. It is a solemn moment and a joyful one.

It is also a joy for us to greet the distinguished members of your delegation and through them the entire community of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In his goodness, God has been wisely and patiently following out the plan of his grace for us. We meet at a time when Christians are asking themselves about the meaning of the faith they profess and the mission they have to the world. You come to this ancient See of Rome, bearing with you the traditions of the ancient See of Alexandria, of its apostles, its martyrs, its doctors, its holy monks and the vast army of its people, who have given witness to their faith in periods of joy and in periods of great darkness. It is our hope that through our discussions and prayer we may make a significant contribution towards understanding each other better, thus making it possible to help Christians find valid answers to the questions they are asking themselves today.

We realize that God is presenting us with a great challenge. We do not expect to overcome immediately the difficulties that fifteen centuries of history have created for us. But we do hope to be able to set out upon a way which will lead to our overcoming these difficulties. For our part, we approach these meetings in a spirit of great confidence. We are confident that our Churches are determined to reach out to each other in an effort to carry out better the mission God has entrusted to us. We strive to be faithful servants of the tradition which has been handed on to us from the Apostles through the Fathers and great spiritual leaders of this Church. But that tradition is a living one. The efforts at renewal which are going on in the Catholic Church and in the Coptic Church give testimony to this.

We are confident therefore that our meetings during these days will strengthen the bonds of brotherly love between us and between our people. May God enlighten us and guide us and grant us new insights as we strive together to see how we may attain that full unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace which Christ asks of us and which is his gift.