



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO HIS HOLINESS MORAN MAR BASELIUS MARTHOMA MATHEWS I,
CATHOLICOS OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF INDIA**

Friday, 3 June 1983

Your Holiness,

It is with great warmth and joy that today I welcome you and your honoured delegation to this city in which the Apostles Peter and Paul crowned their testimony.

In your person I greet a Church which traces its origins to the preaching of the Apostle Thomas and to his witness to Jesus Christ. The apostolic fraternity unites us to the same mystery of Jesus Christ, whom the apostles followed and listened to. After his Resurrection from the dead, they confessed him before the world.

“My Lord and my God” (*Io.* 20, 28), exclaimed the Apostle Thomas, indicating for all time a confession of faith in Christ, proclaiming his divinity, his salvific Lordship, his bodily Resurrection – so real that it could be seen and touched (*Cfr. ibid.* 20, 27). It is in this faith that comes through the Apostles even unto our time that we meet here today.

Our two Churches proclaim together this faith through the Nicene-Constantinople formula: “Credo in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, Filium Dei Unigenitum”.

The development of history, in its complexity, has led our Churches to live separately for long ages, in mutual lack of knowledge and even, at times, in opposition.

A lack of knowledge of one another’s cultural and religious language, as well as of historical, geographic and political factors, has unfortunately brought about a reciprocally harmful estrangement which has progressively deepened not only diversities, but also divergences,

sometimes leading to confusion between the one and ‘the other, thus making the burden and its consequences yet more heavy.

The deepening of theological studies and, above all, our direct contacts are clarifying the horizon and making us now see with a greater light the profound communion that already exists between the two Churches.

I see in my mind’s eye the tribune of delegated observers of the various Churches to the II Vatican Council. Among them were the representatives of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, for whom the Catholic Church again expresses its profound and permanent gratitude. Their silent but attentive presence, at a time when the Catholic Church was in the process of outlining her policy in regard to other Christians, was a living appeal to fraternal respect, to objective research into the communion of faith actually existing, to the serene identification of the real divergences and of the instruments for confronting and resolving them. I believe that the deliberations of the Council owe much to this physical and spiritual presence.

The Council not only recalled a fraternal attitude towards other Christians, but also showed the foundation of common faith and doctrine. In regard to the Churches of the East, the Council asserted that they have “true sacraments, above all, by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in a very close relationship”, adding in consequence that “through the Eucharist in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15).

It is in this rediscovered communion of faith and sacraments, which goes beyond every contingent interpretation or non-comprehension, that the II Vatican Council has established further relations between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Churches.

Study and direct contacts have made it possible to see anew a reality which the dust of time had almost buried and which dimmed eyes could no longer see.

Blessed be the Lord who warms the heart of man and enlightens his mind to understand at the proper time his will and also gives the strength to accomplish it.

Our encounter today is certainly blessed by the Lord, because we wish to be attentive to his will which directs that his disciples be one, so that the world may believe (Cfr. *Io.* 17, 22).

Jesus Christ died upon the Cross “to gather into one all the dispersed children of God” (*Ibid.* 11, 52).

To his prayer and to his salvific work we want to remain faithful. And it is my hope that the spirit of this our fraternal and abiding meeting will be spread to the faithful of the Catholic Church and the

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, particularly where they are living side by side. May there grow mutual understanding. May there grow mutual respect and love, and let them be expressed in fraternal and constructive collaboration, according to the concrete possibilities of place, whether in the social field, the cultural climate or above all, in the pastoral sphere, in order to testify before our neighbours that Jesus Christ is our God and our only Lord.

Ecumenism on the local level has decisive importance for the general promotion of the unity of all Christians.

Unity is a distinctive note of the Christian community. Division in its various expressions tarnishes it, sometimes compromises it. The II Vatican Council pointed out that this damages the most holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). As much before all those who do not yet know the name of Jesus Christ, as among those nations traditionally Christian but which are facing a crisis of identity and are in danger of rejecting the Christian faith, or at least of minimizing it, there emerges the urgency of a growing commitment to the quest for unity.

I wish to assure Your Holiness, on the part of the Catholic Church, that no effort will be spared to give due attention to all that needs to be done. We shall make use of theological research, examine areas of pastoral concern and engage in theological conversations and dialogue. Above all we will have recourse to prayer, for we are certain that unity, just like salvation itself, is a gift of God and therefore “depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy” (*Rom.* 9, 16).

The Catholic Church is thus disposed to intense ecumenical collaboration in the search for perfect unity, in order to render common testimony to our one Lord, and in order to serve together the people of our time, proclaiming to them that Jesus Christ our Saviour is the life of the world.

Your Holiness, with these sentiments, I greet you with reverence and fraternal love. Blessed be God who has made this meeting possible. May he grant that, overcoming every remaining difficulty, we shall meet one day in full unity in the concelebration of the Eucharist.

“To him be glory in the Church in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (*Eph.* 3, 21).

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