



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO HIS HOLINESS ABUNA PAULOS,
PATRIARCH OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Friday, 11 June 1993

Your Holiness,

1. It is truly a great joy for me to receive you and those who accompany you here today. In welcoming you, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, it is a beloved brother that I greet, one who represents a Church to which I feel very close.

In this time of Pentecost when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who has gathered into one those who were once scattered, I extend most willingly, dear brother, the hand of welcome.

Your presence in Rome reminds us of that long tradition of Ethiopian pilgrims, who since the Middle Ages have come to Rome in great numbers to venerate the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. To them my Predecessors always accorded cordial hospitality within the Vatican itself. I therefore see your visit as a carrying forward of that venerable tradition, but above all as the visible expression of the profound communion that we have been rediscovering together for some years. How marvellous are the works of the spirit of God! For we, who had almost thought of ourselves as strangers to one another, now find that we are ever more closely united by the Spirit, who is our reconciliation and the bond of peace (Cf. Eph. 4: 3).

2. The deep communion that exists between us, despite the vicissitudes of history, is rooted in the fundamental realities of our Christian faith. For we share the faith handed down from the Apostles, as also the same sacraments and the same ministry, rooted in the apostolic succession. This was strongly stated in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15).

Today, moreover, we can affirm that we have the one faith in Christ, even though for a long time this was a source of division between us. Although our traditions used different formulations to express the same ineffable mystery of the union of humanity and divinity in the Word made Flesh, our two Churches in full accord with the Apostolic faith confess both the distinction and the complete union of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God. So it is that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church confess the same faith in Him who forever remains "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14: 6), the Lord and Saviour of the world.

All this should spur us on to seek new and suitable ways of fostering the rediscovery of our communion in the concrete daily life of the faithful of our two Churches.

We must do all we can to heal the memories of misunderstanding in the past and to promote new attitudes based on forgiveness, mutual esteem and respect. We must resist all hostility and every spirit of rivalry between us, so that we may engage resolutely, through mutual collaboration, in the building up of our Churches.

3. As we guide our faithful towards the rediscovery of full communion, let us seek to avoid anything that might sow confusion in their ranks. I can assure you that such is the wish of the Catholic Bishops in Ethiopia. Catholics and Orthodox – in their recognition and respect for one another as pastors of that part of the flock which is entrusted to each can have no other aim than the growth and the unity of the People of God.

That is the expectation of our faithful who are convinced that "brothers who once shared the same sufferings and trials ought not to oppose one another today, but should look together at the future opening before them with promising signs of hope" (John Paul II, *Letter to the European Bishops*, 2, 31 May 1991).

The field for cooperation is vast. It should begin with an improvement in fraternal relationships on all levels, but most particularly among those who have the task of leadership.

Having restored this dialogue of charity between us, we may be more confident when we ask the Lord with one heart for the gift of unity, especially on the occasion of the universal *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, for which, as you know, the theme is jointly prepared each year by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches, to which since its inception your Church has belonged.

Finally, the circumstances of the present time require us to work together in the *pastoral domain*, so as not to put any obstacle in the way of "that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to all creatures" (Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

I am thinking particularly of the formation of future priests and parish workers in which the Catholic

Committee for Cultural Collaboration is already engaged by providing scholarships for Ethiopian Orthodox students so that they can pursue their studies and undertake specializations; I am thinking also of the Liturgy, our ancient heritage which, if it is to remain alive, must be accessible to the people of our day; I mention also – and it is among the most urgent of problems – pastoral work among Ethiopians who have migrated to Europe and North America: likewise, the evangelization of the young, charitable work among refugees, and all the many forms of development that are necessary in order to reconstruct the country after so many difficult years.

4. On this auspicious occasion, I wish to reiterate to Your Holiness the deep respect in which the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is held by the Catholic Church for having maintained and preserved over the centuries the patrimony of Christian faith and culture. The baptism of the Ethiopian which is reported in the Acts of the Apostles (Cf. Acts. 8: 27-39) bears witness to the ancient origins of your Christian faith. Following his lead, and with the same joy, the Ethiopian people embraced the Gospel and have remained faithful to it despite the many sufferings they have had to endure, even in the recent past. The close link between faith and Ethiopian culture, the persistence of the ancient monastic tradition, the riches and splendour of your liturgy – these are among the many things which the Catholic Church observes with sincere admiration.

My dear brothers, for some days now you have been going to the principal places of pilgrimage in Rome. You have already prayed at the tomb of the Apostle Peter and you will continue this afternoon and tomorrow to visit the great Basilicas and precious Christian treasures of this venerable city. I am also happy that you are also taking the opportunity to visit living communities, both monasteries and parishes, where Christians seek to celebrate and put their faith into practice. It is my earnest prayer that these spiritual meetings between our Churches may demonstrate in a public way the strength of our desire for full communion. Through the intercession of Mary, the great Mother of God, may the Holy Spirit hasten the day when we may once more eat and drink at the same Table of the Lord.

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