



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CUBA (JANUARY 21-26, 1998)

MEETING WITH OTHER CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 25 January 1998

1. On this memorable day, I am very pleased to meet you, the representatives of the Cuban Council of Churches and of various other Christian communities, accompanied by members of the Jewish community in Cuba, which participates in the Council as an observer. I greet all of you with great affection and I assure you of my happiness at this meeting with those with whom we share faith in the living and true God. This auspicious occasion prompts us to say before all else: "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity*" (Ps 132:1).

I have come to this country as a messenger of hope and truth, to encourage and confirm in faith the Bishops and faithful of the different Dioceses (cf. *Lk 23:32*). But it has also been my wish that my greeting should reach all Cubans, as a concrete sign of God's infinite love for everyone. In this visit to Cuba, as is my custom on my apostolic journeys, I could not fail to have this meeting with you, sharing as I do your concern for the restoration of unity among Christians and for co-operation in favour of the overall progress of the Cuban people, a progress which also calls for the spiritual and transcendent values of faith. Our meeting is possible thanks to our shared hope in the promises of salvation which God has made to us and which he has manifested to us in Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the human race.

2. Today, on *the feast of the Conversion of St Paul*, the Apostle whom "*Christ made his own*" (cf. *Phil 3:12*) and who thenceforth devoted all his energies to preaching the Gospel to the nations, we conclude the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. This year we have celebrated it under the theme:

"*The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness*" (Rom 8:26). Through this annual week of prayer, which was instituted many years ago and which has taken on an increasing significance, we try not only to draw the attention of all Christians to the importance of the ecumenical movement, but also to emphasize in a practical and clear way the pillars upon which all ecumenical activities must be founded.

This moment offers me the opportunity to reaffirm, in this land so deeply nourished by the Christian faith, the irrevocable commitment of the Church to persevere in her ardent desire for the full unity of Christ's disciples, repeating constantly with him: "*Father, may they all be one*" (cf. Jn 17:21) and thus obeying his will. This commitment must not be lacking in any part of the Church, regardless of the sociological situation in which she might find herself. Each nation, it is true, has its own culture and its own religious history, and therefore ecumenical activities in different places have distinct and special characteristics. But beyond that, it is most important that relations between all who have the same faith in God should always be fraternal. No historical circumstance, no ideological or cultural conditioning should hinder these fraternal relations, the centre and purpose of which must be solely to serve the unity which Jesus wished.

We know that *a return to full communion demands love, courage and hope*, which are the fruit of persevering prayer, the source of every commitment truly inspired by the Lord. From this prayer come purification of the heart and interior conversion, both of which are essential in discerning the action of the Holy Spirit as the guide of individuals, of the Church and of history. Prayer also fosters a oneness of heart which transforms our wills and makes them docile to the promptings of the Spirit. This is likewise the way to nourish an ever more lively faith. It is the Spirit who has guided the ecumenical movement, and to the same Spirit is to be attributed the significant progress which has been made and which has taken us beyond the times when relations between the different Christian communities were marked by a mutual indifference, which in some places also turned to open hostility.

3. Intense dedication to ensuring the unity of all Christians is one of the signs of hope which mark the latter part of this century (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 46). This sign applies also to the Christians of Cuba, who are called not only to engage in dialogue in a spirit of respect but also to work together in mutual accord on joint projects designed to help the entire population to progress in peace and to grow in the essential values of the Gospel, which confer dignity upon the human person and make human society more just and cohesive. Together with the *dialogue of truth*, we are all called to pursue a daily *dialogue of charity*, which can present to Cuban society as a whole the true image of Christ and foster understanding of his redeeming mission and of commitment to the salvation of all people.

4. I also wish to address a particular greeting to the Jewish community represented here. Your presence is an eloquent expression of the fraternal dialogue aimed at a better understanding between Jews and Catholics, and which, promoted by the Second Vatican Council, continues to

be ever more widespread. With you we share a common spiritual patrimony, firmly rooted in the Sacred Scriptures. May God, the Creator and Saviour, sustain our efforts to walk together and, encouraged by the divine word, may we grow in worship and fervent love of him. May all of this ever find expression in effective action for the benefit of each and every person.

5. To conclude, I wish to thank each one of you for your presence at this meeting, and I ask God to bless you and your communities and to keep you in his ways so that you may proclaim his name to the brethren. May he show you his face in the midst of the society which you serve, and may he grant you peace in all your undertakings.

Havana, 25 January 1998, feast of the Conversion of St Paul.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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