



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO MAR IGNATIUS JACOUB III,
ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH**

Monday, 25 October 1971

Your Holiness,

With joy we extend our fraternal greeting as We welcome you to Our home. In your person We salute a Church which sees in the faith and devotion of the apostolic community of Antioch the roots and foundation of its own Christian witness. We are particularly happy to welcome an exalted visitor from Damascus, where, in receiving the holy waters of baptism, the Apostle of the Nations, whose name We bear, began that life of total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ which was to lead him to this city of Rome and the supreme sacrifice of his life out of love for that Lord.

Nine years ago, Your Holiness accepted the invitation of Our predecessor of venerated memory, John XXIII, to be represented at the Second Vatican Council by a delegated observer. Since that time the exchange of letters between us and the visit of qualified members of Our Church to Your Holiness have helped strengthen the relations between our Churches. Now we have the joy of meeting in person so that we may share the thoughts and desires which animate us as we strive to fulfil God's wish for His Church and for the world redeemed by the precious Blood of His Son.

The history of the relations between our Churches shows many lights and shadows. We recognize that difficulties which have been created over centuries are not always easily overcome. Each of us is motivated by a sincere desire to be faithful to our Fathers in the faith and to the tradition they have handed down to us. Yet this very desire to be faithful to them impels us to search with ever greater zeal for the realization of full communion with each other.

We share a common sacramental life and a common Apostolic tradition, particularly as affirmed in what is popularly called the Nicene Creed. The dogmatic definitions of the first three Ecumenical

Councils form part of our common heritage. Thus we confess together the mystery of the Word of God, become one of us to save us and to permit us to become in Him sons of God and brothers of each other.

It is in total submission to this Lord and Saviour, God the Son Incarnate, that we will be able to find the way towards that reconciliation which will bring us to perfect communion. The Syrian Orthodox Church in union with her sister Oriental Orthodox Churches, meeting in Addis Ababa in 1965, has already determined to press forward for a dialogue which will help overcome the misunderstandings of the past. Already theologians are working with renewed effort to throw new light on the mystery of the one Lord Jesus Christ. If they recognize that there are still differences in the theological interpretation of this mystery of Christ because of different ecclesiastical and theological traditions, they are convinced, however, that these various formulations can be understood along the lines of the faith of the early councils, which is the faith we also profess (Cfr. POPE PIUS XII, Encyclical *Sempiternus Rex*, AAS 1951, pp. 636-637).

We, as pastors, can encourage the common efforts being made for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this mystery which, far from raising doubts about our two different ecclesiastical traditions, can reinforce them and show the basic harmony which exists between them.

The task is the more urgent because of the demands which are being made upon the Churches today. In a world which is struggling to give birth to new ideas, to new developments which can enable all men to share in the gifts of God's creation, to new relationships between men and nations which will ensure peace with justice, we are called to proclaim the «one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all» (Eph. 4, 5-6).

If we can carry on this task in fraternal communion we will contribute in an even more perfect way to &at service of the world which is an essential part of the mission of the Church. We will be fulfilling our vocation to see the mystery of the compassion of God translated into Christian compassion between men and for men.

In the visit of Your Holiness We see a new testimony to our common desire to carry out this mission and fulfil this vocation, As We welcome you, We pray that God may guide our steps for the glory of His name and the peace and reconciliation of all those who are called to be His sons.