

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO ILIA II, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE
ANCIENT APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF GEORGIA**

Friday, 6 June 1980

*Your Holiness and Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Lord,*

Today is indeed a joyful day in the long history of our Churches, for it is the first time that a Catholicos Patriarch of the Ancient Apostolic Church of Georgia has visited this Apostolic See of Rome to exchange the kiss of peace with its Bishop. In recent years there has been a steady growth in the good relations between our Churches as each has shared in the sorrows and the joys of the other, in accord with the words of the Apostle: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another"[1]. Bishop Nikolosi of Sukhumi and Abkhasia, whom I am glad to greet once again, represented Your Holiness at the funeral of my predecessor John Paul I and also at the Mass which inaugurated my own pontificate; it was indeed a joy for me to be assured of your Church's solidarity in prayer for God's blessing as I began my ministry.

Three years ago Paul VI was represented at the funeral of your own predecessor, Catholicos Patriarch David V; and last year Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, led a delegation to bring you my own brotherly greetings. We have, then, greeted each other, but from afar. Now God has enabled us to meet and to speak "face to face, so that our joy may be complete"[2].

We meet as brothers. The Church of Georgia treasures the preaching of St Andrew; the Church of Rome is founded on the preaching of St Peter. Andrew and Peter were brothers by blood, but they became brothers in spirit through their response to the call of Jesus Christ, true Son of God and "the first-born among many brethren"[3], who, in taking to himself the nature of all men, "was not ashamed to call them brethren"[4].

As heirs of Andrew and of Peter we meet today as brothers in Christ.

It is with brotherly love and concern that the Church of Rome has taken a keen interest in the joys and sorrows of the Church of Georgia. In time of peace and in times of persecution alike your Church has borne a faithful and exemplary witness to the Christian faith and the Christian sacraments, a witness borne by many holy men and martyrs from the days of St Nina onwards.

Your Holiness's concern for the renewal of the Church, a renewal firmly rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the particular traditions of the Church of Georgia, is a cause of special joy. You are well aware that the renewal of the Christian life is likewise the concern of the Church of Rome. It is this concern for renewal that has made us so keenly aware of the need and obligation to restore full communion between our Churches. The long course of our history has led to sad, and sometimes bitter, divisions which have led us to lose sight of our brotherhood in Christ and our concern for renewal is one of the factors that has led us to see more clearly the need there is for unity among all who believe in Christ. The Second Vatican Council said: "Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this explains the dynamism of the movement towards unity"[5]. It went on to remind all the faithful that "the closer their union with the Father, the Word and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love"[6].

Today this task of restoring full communion between divided Christians is a priority for all who believe in Christ. It is our duty to Christ, whose seamless robe is rent by division. It is our duty to our fellowmen, for only with one voice can we effectively proclaim one faith in the Good News of salvation and thus obey our Lord's command to bring his Gospel to all mankind. And it is our duty to each other, for we are brothers and must express our brotherhood.

For this reason the Catholic Church has been praying earnestly in these fast weeks for God's blessing on the first meeting of the Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches. How fitting it was that the Commission first gathered on the Island of Patmos, where John was privileged to receive the revelation which enabled to bid us "hear what the Spirit says to the Churches"^[7]. I am glad to learn that two members of your delegation, Bishop Nikolosi and Bishop David, took part in that meeting as representatives of the Church of Georgia, and I look forward to talking with you about it.

We join together in prayer that this dialogue will indeed bring us to that full unity of faith which we both so ardently desire. But our progress towards unity in faith must be matched by constant growth in knowledge and understanding of each other and by an ever-deepening love. When I returned from my own visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch last year, I said: "Union can be only the fruit of the knowledge of the truth in love. They must both operate together; one apart from the other is still not enough, because truth without love is not yet the full truth, just as love does not exist without truth"^[8].

Your Holiness, it is indeed timely that your welcome visit to Rome should occur so soon after this beginning of our theological dialogue, for it enables us to witness to the need for this to be rooted in a dialogue of brotherly love which must characterize relationships between the Churches of which we are the Pastors. As I renew my cordial greeting to you, I recall the words of Saint Peter, the brother of Saint Andrew: "All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind"^[9]. May the Three Divine Persons, whose unity is the highest exemplar and source of the mystery of the unity of the Church^[10] grant us this grace, and so bless our meeting today that it will contribute to the attainment of that goal for which Christ prayed and for which we so ardently long.