

Pope Urges Closer Ties With Moslems

Stressing Conciliation in Turkey Visit, He Embraces Orthodox Patriarch

BY LOUIS B. FLEMING
Times Staff Writer

ISTANBUL, Turkey—Affirming high esteem for the values of Islam, Pope John Paul II on Thursday called for urgent steps to establish closer ties between Christians and Moslems.

It was a speech of conciliation in the face of rising problems in interreligious relations and was given in Ankara, in Asian Turkey, before the Pope flew here, to the European part of Turkey, to embrace Demetrios I, ecumenical patriarch of the Orthodox Church.

"I ask myself if it is not urgent—precisely today when Christians and Moslems are entered in a new period of history—to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us in order to protect and promote together, for all men, as we have been invited to do by the (Vatican) Council, social justice, moral values, peace and liberty," the Pontiff said.

He spoke at a Mass for Roman Catholics in Ankara, celebrated in the crowded chapel of the Italian Embassy, but his words were chosen with care for the message they carried to Islam from the first predominantly Moslem state he has visited since becoming Pope.

His words of praise of Moslem ideals were also carefully chosen, celebrating the fundamentals shared by Jew, Christian and Moslem, but silent on aspects of Islam given new prominence in recent statements by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran.

The theme of conciliation was repeated here in a moving embrace and a kiss of both cheeks as the Pope and the ecumenical patriarch met at the Istanbul airport. Then Demetrios I participated in a Pontifical Mass in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, the first such participation in modern history, probably since Pope and patriarch each excommunicated the other in the year 1054.

They reaffirmed in two private meetings Thursday the commitment of their predecessors, Paul VI and Athenagoras I, to speed the work of reunification of the two streams of Christianity.

"Our meeting is placed into perspective of the universality and the perpetuity of the divine redemption of the human race," Demetrios told the Pope in a meeting at the patriarchate.

He recalled the centuries before division when there was "concelebration on the same altar and the communion in the same chalice." But two hours later, as the Pope celebrated the Eucharist, the patriarch was spectator, not participant, for neither church now accepts common communion and the Pope has opposed any concession on this score until other issues are resolved.

"Communion in prayer will lead us to full communion in the Eucharist," the Pope said in his homily at the Mass. "I dare to hope that this day is near. Personally, I hope it is very near."

The Armenian patriarch, Shnorh Kalustian, joined Demetrios as a guest at the historic mass.

The Pope also confirmed that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches are "on the eve" of a formal theological dialogue by a joint commission to try to complete a reunion of the churches.

The meeting Thursday was the first between John Paul II and Demetrios I and the first between an ecumenical patriarch and a Pope since 1967 when Paul VI and Athenagoras I exchanged visits.

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A SPIRITUAL BOND—Pope John Paul II and Demetrios I, ecumenical patriarch of the Orthodox Church, leave a joint service in Istanbul. The two leaders met for first time Thursday.
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