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**TURKEY AND FAITH TOURISM**

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Two years from now, the Polish-born John Paul II, the first non-Italian pontiff in nearly five centuries, hopes to fulfil one of his most cherished dreams. John Paul II, in the twentieth year of his reign, the longest serving Pope in this century, makes no secret of his desire to lead the Roman Catholic Church into the third millennium. Despite his frailties, the Pope is focused on spiritual celebration of the year 2000 as the crowning achievement of his career. He is inspired by grand designs for the millennium year. On the eve of the new millennium, major plans are in the offing for the commemoration of the 2000th anniversary of Jesus Christ's birth. The years of 1997, 1998 and 1999 have been especially dedicated to the preparations. The celebration of the actual year 2000 will begin with Christmas 1999.

The year 2000 will mark the beginning of a new century and indeed a new millennium of hope for humankind. It will give the opportunity to solemnly look back on recent history with a view to drawing lessons from past events that hindered spiritual and moral progress and to secure the moral drive to continue the quest to provide future generations with the life they deserve. Human vision will not be impaired by the darkness of evil forces, but brightened by understanding, tolerance and peace among the nations of the world. In this regard the personal efforts of Pope John Paul II to serve as a guide to spiritual perfection and the initiatives taken by the Holy See are to be much appreciated. The year 2000 celebrations will afford us many possibilities to promote these values which should basically prevail among individuals and nations across the world. As a country where, throughout history, faiths, cultures and civilisations met in perfect harmony, Turkey should play a leading role to support the growing climate of tolerance in the world. Therefore, those co-operative steps which Turkey and the Holy See can take together for the 2000 celebrations will be helpful for the promotion of common moral values between Islam and Christianity and the creation of peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

As celebrations of the third millennium of Christianity draw near, Turkey becomes aware of the cultural and spiritual importance of this event for all of mankind. There is great scope for religious tourism and pilgrimages in Anatolia because the roots of Christianity are buried deep within this land. The hundreds of thousands of people who each year make pilgrimages to Israel to visit the holy places of the Old and New Testament would also find Turkey an ideal place for their spiritual travels. Anatolia was home to the first Christian communities and one can follow in the footsteps of the Apostles who founded them, from the first saints and martyrs to the first councils and monasteries. Saint Paul, for example, was born in Tarsus, lived in Antakya for a few years, then travelled around nearly all of Turkey preaching in Göreme, Konya, Yalvaç and Ephesus, places much loved by Christians. Paul's missionary journeys took him three times through western Anatolia. It was in Alexandria Troas, near Troy, that he had the vision of a man appealing to him to extend his work to Macedonia. Therefore organised religious itineraries and tours in Anatolia are inspired by his travels.

Antakya played a crucial role in the early history of Christianity. Apostles Peter and Paul preached here in a cave that is considered one of the first Christian churches. "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people," according to Acts 11:26. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The cave where the Saints

preached their gospel from about AD47 to AD54 still exists. It is known as 'St. Peter's Grotto' and is one of the main tourist attractions in the vicinity, drawing in pilgrims and other outsiders passing this way. The first Christian community was established in this city around AD50. Here Paul and Barnabas decided to spread the Good News to Gentiles and not just to Jews; a position they persuaded the early Church to accept. The church of St. Peter still holds mass today.

In terms of this heritage, Turkey should extend every possible co-operation to the organisation committee of the 2000 celebrations. This event will create a huge movement of Christians to the traditional holy sites and Turkey will be pleased to host them. Turkey is doing its best to undertake a project called "Anatolia 2000" to prepare for this important anniversary and is working on making this event a most memorable one. Turkey wishes to take its place in the festivities of the year 2000, with its cultural heritage of thirteen great civilisations and the friendly attitude and approach of its people. Turkey's assets are the common cultural heritage of the world.

Turkey, in effect, is an extension of the Holy Land, the Holy Land of the Primitive Church, where the first followers of the Gospels were called Christians. It was the route taken by the Apostles, in particular Peter and Paul, carrying the Good News west and they reach the capital of the Roman Empire. Pope John Paul II has on several occasions declared that the land of Turkey was rich in memories of the missionary journeys of the great Apostle Paul. The first seven Ecumenical Councils took place in Anatolia. In these years of preparation, Christians were reflecting on the mysteries of the Faith, which were discussed by the fathers of the Faith at the great councils held at İznik, İstanbul, Ephesus and Kadıköy. For Christians, these represent fundamental points of reference regarding faith in God and the Incarnation. The Pope continued by saying that the 2000 celebration was above all a spiritual event. The Christians who will travel to the places connected with their faith will do so primarily as pilgrims, for whom religious celebrations in the many places associated with the beginning of Church's life will be the highlight of their visit. The spiritual leader of the Catholic world expressed his gratefulness to the Turkish government for its willingness to co-operate in the organisation of the celebrations and to host the multitudes that will visit these venerable sites, so dear to all Christians.

Pilgrims will visit Turkey in search of the roots of their Christian faith. As believers, they will try to deepen their faith as they visit the sites, so rich in history. These sites are sacred to the memory of the outstanding leaders of the early Church, who by their lives, their teachings and, for many, the shedding of their blood, enlightened and enriched an early Church persecuted by worldly powers and threatened by the first heresies.

Turkey has been making preparations for the new millennium for the last three years. In 1995, the Ministry of Tourism initiated its Faith Tours, aiming at introducing the historical and cultural heritage of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Faith Tour-1998 is comprised of two different itineraries. The first Faith Tour-1998 took place in the Aegean region during the second week of May, departing from İstanbul and following an itinerary through İznik, Bursa and İzmir. The tour covered several of the Seven Churches of the Revelation—Efes (Ephesus), İzmir (Smyrna), Bergama (Pergamon), Akhisar (Thyatira), Sardes (Sart), Goncalı (Laodicea) and Alaşehir (Philadelphia)—where the first Christians gathered secretly at times when their religion was forbidden. The second Faith Tour-1998 will be held in the last week of September and will again begin in İstanbul, but it will explore mostly the region of south and southeastern Anatolia including Adana, Tarsus, Payas, İskenderun, Antakya, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adıyaman, Mardin and Diyarbakır. The Faith Tours are expected to continue along various routes, with five different tours scheduled for the year 2000.

Talha Çamas, chairman of the Turkish Association of Travel Agencies (Türsab), recently stated that in addition to the measures being taken by the Ministry of Tourism, private sector companies have also made some important arrangements for 2000. Çamas said Türsab was keeping in touch with the authorities of the Holy See and was hoping to have Turkey included as a participant in the 2000 projects that are now under way in Europe and the Middle East.

H. E. Süleyman Demirel, the President of the Republic of Turkey, has invited Pope John Paul II to

pay an official visit to Turkey in 2000. It is hoped that this visit will open up a new page in the friendly relations between Turkey and the Holy See on the eve of the approaching momentous anniversary. The Pope stated his particular gratitude for the invitation and his personal appreciation for the Turkish president's hope-filled message concerning the expectations and challenges of the new millennium. His Holiness assured the President that he would give the invitation every consideration. At the same time, he expressed the hope that those visitors and pilgrims who will travel to Turkey in 2000 have the opportunity, not only to admire places associated with the origins of the Church, but also to celebrate their faith in God in some of those places.

Meanwhile, the Fifth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Tourism was organised in Kuşadası, Turkey, 4-7 May 1998, by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. Almost 200 clergymen and tour operators from 46 countries and five continents attended the congress. Although the main theme was 'Humanity on the Move at the Threshold of a New Millennium', pilgrimages to holy Christian sites on the occasion of the 2000 celebrations were also discussed. In this vein, the speakers asked the Turkish authorities to complete the restoration of sacred Christian places in Anatolia, including the House of the Virgin Mary at Ephesus and St. Paul's and Peter's churches in Tarsus and Antakya, and demanded that these places be opened to worship. Restoration of many of these sites is currently going on under the joint supervision of the Ministries of Tourism and Culture.

The participants, who were thankful for the traditional hospitality of the Turkish nation, also remarked that belief tourism can strengthen solidarity between societies by quoting the following words of Pope John Paul II: "Human beings are like sailors who are voyaging on a stormy sea. All the problems experienced in the world must be solved with everybody's assistance." The Pope, in a telegram he sent to the congress delegates, expressed his joy with regard to this significant initiative and communicated his wish that the meeting, in view of the millennium, emphasise to all the importance of the pastoral care of tourists. H.E. İbrahim Gürdal, the Turkish minister of tourism, attended the closing session of the congress and delivered a farewell speech to the participants.

The House of the Virgin Mary at Ephesus, located a few kilometres from the town of Selçuk, is expected to be a magnet for Christian pilgrims during the millennium celebrations. Apart from being Mary's final home, the area boasts the grove of Saint John as well as a church named after him, and the prison where Saint Paul was confined. Kamil Subaşı the mayor of Selçuk, took part in the congress and stated that his municipality would be able to host 40 million tourists in 2000. He added that they had already made plans for various ritual and ceremonial events to be celebrated separately by the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant faiths.

Lastly, both Turkish and Holy See sources have put forth an interesting and important idea; for Millennium celebrations in the town of Harran, the area from where the Prophet Abraham set off, a place of multi-faith worship be built—a synagogue, a church and a mosque all in one. This would emphasise the deep sense of unity that exists between the three great monotheistic religions, which all worship the same God and would also be a symbol of tolerance and peace for all followers of the three religions. It would be in honour of Abraham, man of faith and Prophet for Jews, Christians and Moslems. This idea could be developed as a symbol of the passage into the third millennium, a symbol of peace and reconciliation for future generations.

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