

Greeting  
of His Holiness  
the Ecumenical Patriarch  
BARTHOLOMEW  
for the two-day Congress  
*“Pope Paul VI, Patriarch Athenagoras, Chiara Lubich.  
Prophecy of Unity between Sister Churches”*  
(25-26 May 2021)

Msgr. Piero Coda,

With great joy in the Lord, honour and gratitude, we greet the two-day Congress organized by the University at Loppiano - Florence, the spiritual and academic centre of the Focolare Movement, on the theme: “Pope Paul VI, Patriarch Athenagoras, Chiara Lubich. Prophecy of Unity between Sister Churches ”.

Truly, our venerable predecessor of blessed memory, Athenagoras, and Pope Paul VI, have taken up by divine inspiration the sacred cause of reconciliation and harmony between the Orthodox and Roman-Catholic Churches, in order to unite in the one chalice. The blessed meeting of the two

Primates in 1964 in Jerusalem was characterized as “the most significant event in the history of relations between the two Churches since 1054 ”. It was a prophetic moment marking the beginning of a new period in relations between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople.

By inspiration wisely given by the Holy Spirit, the two Primates perceived that the West and the East could not live in isolation and self-sufficiency, as this was detrimental to the unity and catholicity of the Body of Christ. They realised that a dialogue of love and truth could lead to unity, founded on the solid ground of the first millennium. In the apt expression of Fr. George Florovsky, West and East are “Siamese twins” who cannot be separated from each other. These ecclesiastical leaders recalled the undeniable fact that the two sister Churches have a common biblical, patristic and ecclesiological tradition and share the teaching of the undivided Church. This can serve as a basis for re-establishing the relationship that broke down between them, even after the schism of 1054 and particularly after the Crusades, when they separated and alienated each other,. Fidelity to the truth of the Gospel and to their common ecclesiastical traditions nourished the dynamism and optimism of these two charismatic men.

A brilliant and blessed fruit of the meeting in Jerusalem and the meetings that followed between the two Primates, as well as those of their direct Successors, in the Phanar and in the Vatican, is the Theological Dialogue conducted with good optimism between the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic Church. This dialogue has produced interesting common ecclesiological texts and contributed in many ways to the deepening of relations between the two sister Churches.

The charismatic founder of your Focolare Movement, our late sister Chiara Lubich, was almost certainly an unofficial ambassador and link in this journey inspired by the Holy Spirit towards reconciliation and unity. She was prompted by the ecumenical vision of love and reconciliation of our well-known predecessor, Patriarch Athenagoras and mainly by her strong desire for the unity of the two Churches. She said characteristically about the great Patriarch, with whom she had met seven times between the years 1967 and 1972: "Athenagoras was a profoundly charismatic person, endowed with more gifts of the Spirit than I had ever known in non-Catholic Christians. In the same way he was a prophet, who saw the future and tolerated the present as a time of waiting", that is, a prophet of that day when unity in the one chalice will be realised.

This two-day Congress that has been organized is a reminder and a renewal of the call to this blessed path, traced out by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras. Chiara Lubich supported this path with her sensitivity, immediacy in communication and certainty that the dynamism in relations between the two Churches, created by the embrace of the two Primate in Jerusalem, which had broken the millennial wall between Rome and Constantinople, should not be weakened. For all of us, the only way to honour the memory, the sacred enthusiasm and the contribution of these three visionaries of unity is the continuation of the dialogue of love in truth and truth in love of the two sister Churches, of the 'dialogue of life' of the faithful, of collaboration and shared initiatives in the face of great contemporary challenges, always looking forward to the desired unity in the Divine Eucharist.

In this spirit, with paternal blessing from the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the organizers of this Spiritual Symposium and its speakers, we wish all of you and the Focolare Movement we love, abundant grace from the God of love.