

Pope Paul VI - Patriarch Athenagoras - Chiara Lubich
Prophecy of unity between sister Churches
Sophia University Institute, 25-26 May 2021

It is a real honour and joy, as the newly elected President of the Work of Mary, to greet the participants at this study and research session of the "Patriarch Athenagoras-Chiara Lubich" Chair of Studies, so in keeping with the aims of the Sophia University Institute.

With special gratitude, I thank **His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I**, who once again - after his unforgettable visit to the Centre of the Work of Mary on October 20th - accompanies the path of the Chair of Studies, which he desired and supported at its inception with his theological vision and tireless action in favour of dialogue. I greet **His Eminence Metropolitan Polycarp**, Orthodox Archbishop of Italy and Exarch of Southern Europe; **His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos** of Selvyria, Co-holder of the Chair of Studies with Professor Piero Coda, whom I greet together with the Rector of Sophia, Professor Giuseppe Argiolas, as well as the Presidency of the Italian Bishops' Conference, in the person of Fr Giuliano Savina, Director of the National Office for Ecumenism and Dialogue. I greet all the speakers.

I congratulate the professors, the present students and warmly thank the co-holders of this Ecumenical Chair of Studies, for the important stimulus given to this promising academic research in line with the commitment to establish among the Christians of the different Churches and ecclesial Communities "relationships of fraternal communion and shared witness", constitutive of the specific aim of the Work of Mary (cf. Statutes, art. 6).

Soon, on 28th and 29th May, our "Centro Uno" for Christian Unity, in a conference on the occasion of its 60th anniversary, will retrace its history and describe its spirit.

Chiara Lubich lived this mission intensely and the extraordinary meetings she had from the 1960s with Patriarch Athenagoras - whom she defined as "the personification of love" - were an immense gift of light and life that inspired the service lived by the Work of Mary, from then until today. These encounters did not only build a very close friendship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, but also with brothers and sisters of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities.

The Ecumenical Chair of Studies at the Sophia University Institute is therefore a concrete sign of this friendship and provides a providential stimulus to revive the current of love towards full unity that flowed from that prophetic encounter.

Chiara, a woman, a lay woman, was called by God to act as an "evangelical bridge" between two giants in the prophecy of unity such as Athenagoras and Paul VI. My wish is that the Ecumenical Chair of Studies may continue, together with the whole Work of Mary, to serve as a bridge of love,

through mutual knowledge and study, between our two sister Churches, walking together in the light of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf Jn. 14:6).

The program of this session highlights the value of collaboration, the richness and depth of a dialogue that is not only possible, but is already taking place, along a path where prophetic vision, thought and life are intertwined.

Given my Eastern roots, these dimensions affect me in a special way! As you know, I was born in Haifa, Galilee, I am an Arab Catholic, and since I was a child I have always lived in great admiration and friendship with my Orthodox contemporaries, who represent the highest percentage of the albeit minority presence of Christians in the Holy Land. When Chiara Lubich's message reached me, addressed specifically to us young people, to let our heart, mind and strength be imbued by the Gospel, I rejoiced and was forever won over.

There I saw the "great attraction of modern times", the possibility of revealing to the world the ineffable beauty of God-Love and the fascination of translating the Word of Jesus into daily life, which makes us another Him, other Marys.

And today in this time of many challenges, when violence and the logic of conflict tragically re-emerge and seem to destroy processes of sharing and hopes for peace, it is even more urgent to broaden the horizons of dialogue. More than ever we are challenged by the cry of Jesus on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34), revealed to Chiara as the apex of Love and the Way to unity.

In the certainty that He lives and works among us when we are united in His Name, it is necessary to emphasize and put into practice the new commandment that Jesus left us as a testimony to the love of the Most Holy Trinity. Yes, what is needed for humanity of our time, too often wounded by the incomprehension and rejection of others, is: "Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

My wish is that this ecumenical chair of studies may welcome that Cry and prove to be a "welcoming home" that lends itself to making the great page of Jesus' Testament resound ever more fully.

With every best wish for a successful meeting!

Margaret Karram