



The Holy See

COMMON DECLARATION OF POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I OF CONSTANTINOPLE

"Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor 16: 13-14).¹ In the spirit of faith in Christ and the reciprocal love that unites us, we thank God for this gift of our new meeting that is taking place on the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and witnesses to our firm determination to continue on our way towards full communion with one another in Christ.² Many positive steps have marked our common journey, starting above all with the historical event that we are recalling today: [the embrace of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, on 5 and 6 January 1964](#). We, their Successors, are meeting today to commemorate fittingly before God that blessed encounter, now part of the history of the Church, faithfully recalling it and its original intentions.³ The embrace in Jerusalem of our respective Predecessors of venerable memory visibly expressed a hope that dwells in all hearts, as the Communiqué declared: "With eyes turned to Christ, together with the Father, the Archetype and Author of unity and of peace, they pray God that this encounter may be the sign and prelude of things to come for the glory of God and the enlightenment of his faithful people. After so many centuries of silence, they have now met with the desire to do the Lord's will and to proclaim the ancient truth of his Gospel, entrusted to the Church" (*Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, Tomos Agapis, Vatican-Phanar, 1971, n. 50, p. 120*).⁴ Unity and Peace! The hope kindled by that historic encounter has lit up our journey in these last decades. Aware that the Christian world has suffered the tragedy of separation for centuries, our Predecessors and we ourselves have persevered in the "dialogue of charity", our gaze turned to that blessed, shining day on which it will be possible to communicate with the same cup of the precious Blood and the holy Body of the Lord (cf. *Patriarch Athenagoras I, Address to Pope Paul VI* [5 January 1964], *ibid.*, n. 48, p. 109). The many ecclesial events that have punctuated these past years have put on firm foundations the commitment to brotherly love: a love which, in learning from past lessons, may be ready to forgive, more inclined to believe in good than in evil and intent first and foremost on complying with the Divine Redeemer and in being attracted and transformed by him (*Address of Pope Paul VI to Patriarch Athenagoras I* [6 January 1964], *ibid.*, n. 49, p. 117).⁵ Let us thank the Lord for the exemplary gestures of reciprocal love, participation and sharing that he has granted us to make; among them, it is only right to recall the [Pope's Visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios in 1979](#), when the creation of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches was announced at the Phanar, a further step to sustain the "dialogue

of truth" with the "dialogue of charity"; Patriarch Dimitrios' visit to Rome in 1987; our meeting in Rome on the feast of Sts Peter and Paul in 1995, when we prayed in St Peter's, despite the painful separation during the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, since we cannot yet drink from the same chalice of the Lord. Then, more recently, there was the [meeting at Assisi for the "Day of Prayer for Peace in the World"](#), and the [Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics for the Safeguard of Creation, signed on 10 June 2002](#) [in the context of the Fourth Symposium on Ecology: *The Adriatic Sea: a Sea at Risk - Unity of Purpose*].⁶ Despite our firm determination to journey on towards full communion, it would have been unrealistic not to expect obstacles of various kinds: doctrinal, first of all, but also the result of conditioning by a troubled history. In addition, the new problems which have emerged from the radical changes that have occurred in political and social structures have not failed to make themselves felt in relations between the Christian Churches. With the return to freedom of Christians in Central and Eastern Europe, old fears have also been reawakened, making dialogue difficult. Nonetheless, St Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: let all things be done in charity, must always be vibrant within us and between us.⁷ The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches, created with so much hope, has marked our progress in recent years. It is still a suitable instrument for studying the ecclesiological and historical problems that are at the root of our difficulties, and for identifying hypothetical solutions to them. It is our duty to persevere in the important commitment to reopen the work as soon as possible. In examining the reciprocal initiatives of the offices of Rome and of Constantinople with this in view, we ask the Lord to sustain our determination, and to convince everyone of how essential it is to pursue the "dialogue of truth".⁸ Our meeting in Rome today also enables us to face certain problems and misunderstandings that have recently surfaced. The long experience of the "dialogue of charity" comes to our aid precisely in these circumstances, so that difficulties can be faced serenely without slowing or clouding our progress on the journey we have undertaken towards full communion in Christ.⁹ Before a world that is suffering every kind of division and imbalance, today's encounter is intended as a practical and forceful reminder of the importance for Christians and for the Churches to coexist in peace and harmony, in order to witness in agreement to the message of the Gospel in the most credible and convincing way possible.¹⁰ In the special context of Europe, moving in the direction of higher forms of integration and expansion towards the East of the Continent, we thank the Lord for this positive development and express the hope that in this new situation, collaboration between Catholics and Orthodox may grow. There are so many challenges to face together in order to contribute to the good of society: to heal with love the scourge of terrorism, to instil a hope of peace, to help set aright the multitude of grievous conflicts; to restore to the European Continent the awareness of its Christian roots; to build true dialogue with Islam, since indifference and reciprocal ignorance can only give rise to diffidence and even hatred; to nourish an awareness of the sacred nature of human life; to work to ensure that science does not deny the divine spark that every human being receives with the gift of life; to collaborate so that our earth may not be disfigured and that Creation may preserve the beauty with which it has been endowed by God; but above all, to proclaim the Gospel Message with fresh vigour, showing contemporary men and women how the Gospel can help them rediscover themselves and to build a more human world.¹¹ Let us pray to the Lord to give peace to the Church and to the world, and to imbue our journey towards full communion with the wisdom of his Spirit, "*ut unum in Christo simus*" [so that we may be one in Christ]. *From the Vatican, 29 June 2004*