

*From Pope Francis*

*To His Holiness Bartholomaios I, Archbishop of Constantinople, Ecumenical Patriarch, "Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph 6:23)*

After welcoming with joy the delegation which Your Holiness sent to Rome for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, it is with the same joy that I convey, through this message entrusted to Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, my spiritual closeness on the feast of Saint Andrew, Peter's brother and the patron saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

With the heartfelt affection reserved for beloved brothers, I offer my prayerful best wishes to Your Holiness, to the members of the Holy Synod, to the clergy, monks and all the faithful, and - together with my Catholic brothers and sisters - join your own prayer on this festive occasion.

Your Holiness, beloved brother in Christ, this is the first time that I address you on the occasion of the feast of the Apostle Andrew, the first-called. I take this opportunity to assure you of my intention to pursue fraternal relations between the Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

It is for me a source of great reassurance to reflect on the depth and the authenticity of our existing bonds, the fruit of a grace-filled journey along which the Lord has guided our Churches since the historic encounter in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, the fiftieth anniversary of which we will celebrate shortly.

God, the source of all peace and love, has taught us throughout these years to regard one another as members of the same family. For indeed we have one Lord and one Savior. We belong to him through the gift of the good news of salvation transmitted by the apostles, through the one baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, and through the holy ministry.

United in Christ, therefore, we already experience the joy of authentic brothers in Christ, while yet fully aware of not having reached the goal of full communion. In anticipation of the day in which we will finally take part together in the Eucharistic feast, Christians are duty-bound to prepare to receive this gift of God through prayer, inner conversion, renewal of life and fraternal dialogue.

Our joy in celebrating the feast of the Apostle Andrew must not make us turn our gaze from the dramatic situation of the many people who are suffering due to violence and war, hunger, poverty and grave natural disasters. I am aware that you are deeply concerned for the situation of Christians in the Middle East and for their right to remain in their homelands.

Dialogue, pardon and reconciliation are the only possible means to achieve the resolution of conflict. Let us be unceasing in our prayer to the all-powerful and merciful God for peace in this region, and let us continue to work for reconciliation and the just recognition of peoples' rights.

Your Holiness, the memory of the martyrdom of the apostle Saint Andrew also makes us think of the many Christians of all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities who in many parts of the world experience discrimination and at times pay with their own blood the price of their profession of faith.

We are presently marking the 1700th anniversary of Constantine's Edict, which put an end to religious persecution in the Roman Empire in both East and West, and opened new channels for the dissemination of the Gospel.

Today, as then, Christians of East and West must give common witness so that, strengthened by the Spirit of the risen Christ, they may disseminate the message of salvation to the entire world. There is likewise an urgent need for effective and committed cooperation among Christians in order to safeguard everywhere the right to express publicly one's faith and to be treated fairly when promoting the contribution which Christianity continues to offer to contemporary society and culture.

It is with sentiments of profound esteem and warm friendship in Christ that I invoke abundant blessings on Your Holiness and on all the faithful of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, asking the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and of the holy apostles and martyrs Peter and Andrew. With the same sentiments I renew my best wishes and exchange with you a fraternal embrace of peace.

From the Vatican, 25 November 2013

## Francis and Bartholomew issue resounding, historic calls for church reunification

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 30, 2014  
Francis in Turkey  
Istanbul



Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, leaders of the millennium-long separated Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, have issued resounding and historic calls for the reunification of their global communities.

Speaking to one another after a solemn Orthodox divine liturgy in St. George, an historic Christian center, Sunday, both leaders pledged to intensify efforts for full unity of their churches, saying such unity already exists among Christians dying in conflicts in the Middle East.

For his part, Francis made what appears to be the strongest and most encompassing call yet from a Catholic pontiff for unity. Seeking to assure Orthodox leaders that restoration of full communion between the churches would respect Eastern traditions, he said reunion would "not signify the submission of one to the other, or assimilation."

"I want to assure each one of you here that, to reach the desired goal of full unity, the Catholic church does not intend to impose any conditions except that of the shared profession of faith," said the pope.

Continuing, Francis said: "The one thing that the Catholic church desires, and that I seek as Bishop of Rome, 'the church which presides in charity,' is communion with the Orthodox churches."

Bartholomew called the process for reunification of the two churches -- started by Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras with a meeting in Jerusalem 50 years ago -- "irreversible" and said the two communities have no option but to join together.

"We no longer have the luxury of isolated action," said Bartholomew. "The modern persecutors of Christians do not ask which church their victims belong to. The unity that concerns us is regrettably already occurring in certain regions of the world through the blood of martyrdom."

The addresses by Bartholomew and Francis came on the last day of the pope's stay in Turkey, which the pontiff has been visiting since Friday. They spoke to one another at the patriarchal church of St. George, where Bartholomew and the ecumenical patriarchate are centered.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, which together are estimated to have some 2 billion adherents, have been separated since the year 1054. Serious efforts for reconciliation between the traditions did not start until the 1964 meeting of Paul and Athenagoras, which eventually led to the opening of joint theological dialogues on reunification in 1980.

Francis and Bartholomew also issued a joint declaration following the liturgy Sunday, pledging "to intensify our efforts to promote the full unity of all Christians, and above all Catholics and Orthodox."

But the strongest words of the day came in the leaders' earlier speeches to one another, in which they both stressed the similarities between their persons and the focus of their communities and made poetic and serious commitments to seeking unity.

Saying that as a result of the Paul and Athenagoras meeting "the flow of history has literally changed direction," Bartholomew said until then "cold love" between the churches had been rekindled and their desire to reunify "galvanized."

"Thenceforth, the road to Emmaus has opened up before us – a road that, while perhaps lengthy and sometimes even rugged, is nonetheless irreversible," said the patriarch.

Asking a series of rhetorical questions, Bartholomew then seemed to pick up on a key phrase of Francis' papacy so far, that the church "cannot be self-centered, revolving around itself."

"What is the benefit of boasting for what we have received unless these translate into life for humanity and our world both today and tomorrow?" asked Bartholomew. The church, he said, "is called to keep its sight fixed not so much on yesterday as on today and tomorrow.

"The church exists not for itself, but for the world and for humanity," he continued.

"Even as we are preoccupied with our own contentions, the world experiences the fear of survival, the concern for tomorrow," said the patriarch. "How can humanity survive tomorrow when it is severed today by diverse divisions, conflicts and animosities, frequently even in the name of God?"

"Nowadays many people place their hope on science; others on politics; still others in technology," he continued. "Yet none of these can guarantee the future, unless humanity espouses the message of reconciliation, love and justice; the mission of embracing the other, the stranger, and even the enemy."

"This is precisely why the path toward unity is more urgent than ever for those who invoke the name of the great Peacemaker," said Bartholomew. "This is precisely why our responsibility as Christians is so great before God, humankind and history."

Francis took a similar theme, saying that in today's world "voices are being raised which we cannot ignore and which implore our churches to live deeply our identity as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The pontiff mentioned particularly the voices of:

- The poor, "who suffer from severe malnutrition, growing unemployment, the rising numbers of unemployed youth, and from increasing social exclusion."

"As Christians we are called together to eliminate that globalization of indifference which today seems to reign supreme, while building a new civilization of love and solidarity," he said.

- Victims of conflicts, saying: "We hear this resoundingly here, because some neighboring countries are scarred by an inhumane and brutal war."

"The cry of the victims of conflict urges us to move with haste along the path of reconciliation and communion between Catholics and Orthodox," said the pope. Citing Paul VI's encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he asked: "Indeed, how can we credibly proclaim the message of peace which comes from Christ, if there continues to be rivalry and disagreement between us?"

- Young people, many of whom "seek happiness solely in possessing material things and in satisfying their fleeting emotions."

"New generations will never be able to acquire true wisdom and keep hope alive unless we are able to esteem and transmit the true humanism which comes from the Gospel and from the church's age-old experience," said Francis. "It is precisely the young who today implore us to make progress towards full communion."

Bartholomew also took a personal tone with Francis, saying his brief papacy had "already manifested you in peoples' conscience today as a herald of love, peace and reconciliation."

"You preach with words, but above and beyond all with the simplicity, humility and love toward everyone that you exercise your high ministry," Bartholomew told Francis. "You inspire trust in those who doubt, hope in those who despair, anticipation in those who expect a church that nurtures all people."

Mentioning that the Orthodox are preparing for a Great Council of their bishops in 2016, Bartholomew also expressed hope that once the Orthodox and Catholics reunified they could host a Great Ecumenical Council together.

"Let us pray that, once full communion is restored, this significant and special day will also not be prolonged," he said.

In their joint declaration together, the patriarch and pope also expressed "common concern" for "Iraq, Syria, and the whole Middle East." While not mentioning specifically any particular group such as the Islamic State, the two lamented the estimated hundreds of thousands who have been forced to flee violence in the region.

"Many of our brothers and sisters are being persecuted and have been forced violently from their homes," said the two leaders.

"It even seems that the value of human life has been lost, that the human person no longer matters and may be sacrificed to other interests," they continued. "And, tragically, all this is met by the indifference of many."

Because of the violence against Christians, they said, "there is also an ecumenism of suffering."

"Just as the blood of the martyrs was a seed of strength and fertility for the church, so too the sharing of daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity," they continued.

Bartholomew and Francis also called for renewed efforts at Christian-Muslim dialogue, saying "we also recognize the importance of promoting a constructive dialogue with Islam based on mutual respect and friendship."

"Muslims and Christians are called to work together for the sake of justice, peace and respect for the dignity and rights of every person, especially in those regions where they once lived for centuries in peaceful coexistence and now tragically suffer together the horrors of war," they said.

The two leaders also mentioned continued turmoil in Ukraine, where some 30 percent of the population is estimated to be Orthodox, calling on "all parties involved to pursue the path of dialogue and of respect for international law."

Francis was to depart Istanbul for the Vatican Sunday afternoon, after meeting with a group of Syrian refugees living in Turkey after fleeing violence in their home country.

During his three-day trip to Turkey, in which Francis visited the capital of Ankara on Friday before heading to Istanbul Saturday, the pontiff also met with Turkish leaders, toured a mosque and the historic Hagia Sophia, and said Mass for Istanbul's small Catholic community.

The pontiff's visit to the continent-straddling nation was keenly watched both for its significance to ecumenical relations and to western outreach to the Middle East, where many have been the victim of violence from the Islamic State group.

Speaking to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Friday, [Francis said](#) [1] military solutions cannot stop violence in the Middle East and instead called for a "solidarity of all believers" to counter religious fundamentalism.

To Istanbul's small Catholic community Saturday, the pontiff [called on the church](#) [2] to leave its "comfort zone" and to "throw off defensiveness" to overcome misunderstanding and division.

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## Pope Francis & Patriarch Bartholomew sign joint declaration

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(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the Orthodox world, on Sunday signed a Joint Declaration reaffirming their desire to overcome the obstacles dividing their two Churches. The two leaders also deplored the terrible situation facing Christians and all who are suffering in the Middle East and called for an appropriate response from the international community.

*Please find below the full text of the Joint Declaration:*

### JOINT DECLARATION

We, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, express our profound gratitude to God for the gift of this new encounter enabling us, in the presence of the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy and the faithful of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to celebrate together the feast of Saint Andrew, the first-called and brother of the Apostle Peter. Our remembrance of the Apostles, who proclaimed the good news of the Gospel to the world through their preaching and their witness of martyrdom, strengthens in us the aspiration to continue to walk together in order to overcome, in love and in truth, the obstacles that divide us.

On the occasion of our meeting in Jerusalem last May, in which we remembered the historical embrace of our venerable predecessors Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, we signed a joint declaration. Today on the happy occasion of this further fraternal encounter, we wish to re-affirm together our shared intentions and concerns.

We express our sincere and firm resolution, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to intensify our efforts to promote the full unity of all Christians, and above all between Catholics and Orthodox. As well, we intend to support the theological dialogue promoted by the Joint International Commission, instituted exactly thirty-five years ago by the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios and Pope John Paul II here at the Phanar, and which is currently dealing with the most difficult questions that have marked the history of our division and that require careful and detailed study. To this end, we offer the assurance of our fervent prayer as Pastors of the Church, asking our faithful to join us in praying “that all may be one, that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

We express our common concern for the current situation in Iraq, Syria and the whole Middle East. We are united in the desire for peace and stability and in the will to promote the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and reconciliation. While recognizing the efforts already being made to offer assistance to the region, at the same time, we call on all those who bear responsibility for the destiny of peoples to deepen their commitment to suffering communities, and to enable them, including the Christian ones, to remain in their native land. We cannot resign ourselves to a Middle East without Christians, who have professed the name of Jesus there for two thousand years. Many of our brothers and sisters are being persecuted and have been forced violently from their homes. It even seems that the value of human life has been lost, that the human person no longer matters and may be sacrificed to other interests. And, tragically, all this is met by the indifference of many. As Saint Paul reminds us, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:26). This is the law of the Christian life, and in this sense we can say that there is also an ecumenism of suffering. Just as the blood of the martyrs was a seed of strength and fertility for the Church, so too the sharing of daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity. The terrible situation of Christians and all those who are suffering in the Middle East calls not only for our constant prayer, but also for an appropriate response on the part of the international community.

The grave challenges facing the world in the present situation require the solidarity of all people of good will, and so we also recognize the importance of promoting a constructive dialogue with Islam based on mutual respect and friendship. Inspired by common values and strengthened by genuine fraternal sentiments, Muslims and Christians are called to work together for the sake of justice, peace and respect for the dignity and rights of every person, especially in those regions where they once lived for centuries in peaceful coexistence and now tragically suffer together the horrors of war. Moreover, as Christian leaders, we call on all religious leaders to pursue and to strengthen interreligious dialogue and to make every effort to build a culture of peace and solidarity between persons and between peoples. We also remember all the people who experience the sufferings of war. In particular, we pray for peace in Ukraine, a country of ancient Christian tradition, while we call upon all parties involved to pursue the path of dialogue and of respect for international law in order to bring an end to the conflict and allow all Ukrainians to live in harmony.

Our thoughts turn to all the faithful of our Churches throughout the world, whom we greet, entrusting them to Christ our Saviour, that they may be untiring witnesses to the love of God. We raise our fervent prayer that the Lord may grant the gift of peace in love and unity to the entire human family.

“May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you”  
(2 Thess 3:16).

From the Phanar, 30 November 2014

[\(from Vatican Radio\)](#)

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/30/pope\\_francis\\_\\_patriarch\\_bartholomew\\_sign\\_joint\\_declaration/1113026](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/30/pope_francis__patriarch_bartholomew_sign_joint_declaration/1113026)