

VII. THE COMMON DECLARATION
OF THE POPE AND PATRIARCH

June 29, 1995

On the evening of Thursday, 29 June, Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I signed a Common Declaration in the Vatican at their last meeting before the Patriarchs departure from Rome. The following is a translation of the Declaration, which was written in Italian.

“ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3).

1. We also thank God for this brotherly meeting of ours which took place in his name and with the firm intention of obeying his will that his disciples be one (*Jn 17:21*). Our meeting has followed other important events which have seen our Churches declare their desire to relegate the excommunications of the past to oblivion and to set out on the way to re-establishing full communion. Our venerable predecessors Athenagoras I and Paul VI became pilgrims to Jerusalem in order to meet in the Lord's name, precisely where the Lord, by his Death and Resurrection, brought humanity forgiveness and salvation. Subsequently, their meetings at the Phanar and in Rome have initiated this new tradition of fraternal visits in order to foster a true dialogue of charity and truth. This exchange of visits was repeated during the ministry of Patriarch Dimitrios, when, among other things, the theological dialogue was formally opened. Our new-found brotherhood in the name of the one Lord has led us to frank discussion, a dialogue that seeks understanding and unity.

2. This dialogue — through the Joint International Commission — has proved fruitful and has made substantial progress. A common sacramental conception of the Church has emerged, sustained and passed on in time by the apostolic succession. In

our Churches, the apostolic succession is fundamental to the sanctification and unity of the People of God. Considering that in every local Church the mystery of divine love is realized and that this is how the Church of Christ shows forth its active presence in each one of them, the Joint Commission has been able to declare that our Churches recognize one another as Sister Churches, responsible together for safeguarding the one Church of God, in fidelity to the divine plan, and in an altogether special way with regard to unity.

We thank the Lord of the Church from the bottom of our hearts because these affirmations we have made together not only hasten the way to solving the existing difficulties, but henceforth enable Catholics and Orthodox to give a common witness of faith.

3. This is particularly appropriate on the eve of the third millennium when 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, all Christians are preparing to make an examination of conscience on the reality of his proclamation of salvation in history and among men.

We will celebrate this Great Jubilee on our pilgrimage towards full unity and towards that blessed day, which we pray is not far off, when we will be able to share the same bread and the same cup, in the one Eucharist of the Lord.

Let us invite our faithful to make this spiritual pilgrimage together towards the Jubilee. Reflection, prayer, dialogue, reciprocal forgiveness and mutual fraternal love will bring us closer to the Lord and will help us better to understand his will for the Church and for humanity.

4. In this perspective we urge our faithful, Catholics and Orthodox, to reinforce the spirit of brotherhood which stems from the one Baptism and from participation in the sacramental life. In the course of history and in the more recent past, there have been attacks and acts of oppression on both sides. As we prepare, on this occasion, to ask the Lord for his great mercy, we invite all to forgive one another and to express a firm will that a new relationship of brotherhood and active collaboration will be established.

Such a spirit should encourage both Catholics and Orthodox, especially where they live side by side, to a more intense collaboration in the cultural, spiri-

tual, pastoral, educational and social fields, avoiding any temptation to undue zeal for their own community to the disadvantage of the other. May the good of Christ's Church always prevail! Mutual support and the exchange of gifts can only make pastoral activity itself more effective and our witness to the Gospel we desire to proclaim more transparent.

5. We maintain that a more active and concerted collaboration will also facilitate the Church's influence in promoting peace and justice in situations of political or ethnic conflict. The Christian faith has unprecedented possibilities for solving humanity's tensions and enmity.

6. In meeting one another, the Pope of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarch have prayed for the unity of all Christians. In their prayers, they have included all the baptized who are incorporated into Christ, and they have asked for an ever deeper fidelity to his Gospel for the various communities.

7. They bear in their heart a concern for all humanity, without any discrimination according to race, colour, language, ideology or religion.

They therefore encourage dialogue, not only between the Christian Churches, but also with the various religions, and above all, with those that are monotheistic.

All this doubtless represents a contribution and a presupposition for strengthening peace in the world, for which our Churches pray constantly. In this spirit, we declare, without hesitation, that we are in favour of harmony among peoples and their collaboration, especially in what concerns us most directly; we pray for the full realization of the European Union, without delay, and we hope that its borders will be extended to the East.

At the same time, we make an appeal that everyone will make a determined effort to solve the current burning problem of ecology, in order to avoid the great risk threatening the world today due to the abuse of resources that are God's gift.

May the Lord heal the wounds tormenting humanity today and hear our prayers and those of our faithful for peace in our Churches and in all the world.

ORE, July 12, 1995