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ADDRESS
BY HIS ALL-HOLINESS
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW
TO THE DELEGATION OF THE CHURCH OF ROME
ON THE OCCASION OF THE THRONAL FEAST
OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
(Phanar, 30 November 2019)

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Your Eminence, beloved brother in Christ, Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and honorable members of the official Delegation of the Church of Elder Rome,

We greet you with great joy at the Apostolic See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, at the Phanar, on the occasion of the Thronal Feast of the Church of Constantinople, the annual commemoration of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Andrew the First Called. Your presence here today, according to the long established and blessed tradition of exchanging delegation on the occasion of Thronal Feasts of our respective Churches, manifests the bond of peace and love that keep us in the unity of the Spirit (cf. Eph 4:3), as well as a symbol of our common strong desire for the restoration of communion between our sister Churches. As Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon of blessed memory, one of the pioneers of the establishment of this nice custom of our common commemoration of the brothers and founders of our Churches, Apostles Andrew and Peter, had rightly observed, this is not "a static action of repetition, but an always new foundation, a dynamic progress and a penetration to the mystery of the Church, which gradually moves to the end of times," a blessed meeting, "which supplements and illumines both our theological dialogue and all the other expressions of our fraternal relations," giving prominence to "the divine dimension of our whole endeavor for unity" [*Χαλκηδόνια* (Athens, 1999), 435].

During the Divine Liturgy we have just celebrated, we heard the *pericope* from the Gospel according to John the Theologian about the vocation of the Holy Apostles Andrew the *Protophete* and his brother Peter the Coryphaeus: Andrew "first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'we have found the Messiah,' which means Christ, and to bring him to our Lord, who looking at him, said: 'You are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Cephas,' which is translated as Peter" (Jn 1:41-43). This close relationship between the two brothers according to the flesh is a prototype for the spiritual relations between

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our two sister Churches and an invitation to common Christian witness in the world and proclamation of the Gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

As it was highlighted by Fr. Georges Florovsky, who has been called "the dean of Orthodox theology" in the 20th century, whose 40th anniversary since his falling asleep in the Lord the Ecumenical Patriarchate honored through the organization in Istanbul of a three-day international theological conference entitled "The Theological Legacy of Archpriest Georges Florovsky (September 1-3, 2019), all the Christians belong to the same spiritual space. East and West are not independent, self-sufficient and self-explained units. It is not possible for them to be perceived as separated, since they have common past, they come from a common tradition, which was gradually warped and ruptured. According to Fr. Florovsky, "the tragedy of division is the greatest and the most crucial problem in Christian history" ["Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," in *Topics of Ecclesiastical History* (Thessaloniki, 1979), 34]. The remembrance of the common Christian heritage and the realization of the tragedy of division is a constant impetus for the continuation of the struggle for the restoration of the lost unity.

During the last decades, on the road to the common cup, our Churches cultivate the dialogue of love and the dialogue of truth. The first is made up of all those gestures that brought us closer after the embrace exchanged in Jerusalem in 1964 by Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of blessed memory. The second is composed of bodies of theological dialogue that allow us to consider the common traditions on which to build our future of communion, studying with honesty and respecting the issues that still our Churches, in unshakeable certainty that nothing in the ecclesiastical life flourishes without a stable theological basis.

For this reason, we are delighted to learn that the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between our Churches, which is now working for almost forty years, has progressed on a meaningful document on "Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today." During the Coordinating Committee that just took place at the hospitable Monastery of Bose, a revised draft of this document was examined, in preparation for the next plenary meeting of the abovementioned Commission for Theological Dialogue.

Today, an important dimension of the dialogue of love and truth is "juridical ecumenism," i.e. the practical deployment of the canons and the other regulatory instruments of our Churches as inseparable from our quest for agreement at the level of doctrine, achieved through theological debate, which has been so far the principal and dominant focus in our dialogue. In terms of the importance of canon law for the advancement of the theological dialogue

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between our two sister Churches, the *Ravenna Agreed Statement* affirms: "In order for there to be full ecclesial communion, there must be, between our Churches, reciprocal recognition of canonical legislations in their legitimate diversities" (§ 16). As we had the chance to underline this past September in Rome in our Keynote Address at the 24th International Congress of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches, the canons should not be "treated merely as 'borders' that define the 'limits of the Church,' again according to the famous phrase of Georges Florovsky ["The Limits of the Church," in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky – Essential Theological Writings*, Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur eds. (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 247-256, at 256.]. We underlined that the common canonical tradition of the first millennium serves "as a theoretical and practical framework to complement our long-ago established dialogue of truth and love, our commitment to always 'speak the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15)."

A few days after our Keynote Address, our brother Pope Francis, whom we had the joyful opportunity to meet and embrace once again in the Vatican, concurred to our position, emphasizing that the theological dialogue between the two sister Churches has "a canonical dimension too, since ecclesiology finds expression in the institutions and the law of the Churches. It is clear, therefore, that canon law is not only an aid to ecumenical dialogue, but also an essential dimension." And the Pope reminded that our current theological dialogue "seeks precisely a common understanding of primacy and synodality and their relationship in the service of the unity of the Church ... based on the common canonical heritage of the first millennium."

The dialogue of truth in "the bond of love" is also enriched, comprehended and reinforced by "the ecumenism of saints". As your beloved Eminence once said, dear Cardinal Kurt Koch, "The ecumenism of the saints is a very good opportunity for dialogue between the Churches [...] This is very important because the veneration of the relics can help to involve the faithful in the commitment to dialogue. Indeed, it is nice that the leaders of the Churches meet, but it is very important that the people of the believers also do it." For this reason, we were greatly touched when we learned last June, on the Thronal Feast of the Church of Rome, that His Holiness, our brother Pope Francis, was giving us fragments of the holy relics of the Holy Apostle Peter. In this prophetic ecumenical sign, we can identify several profound meanings. The arrival of the relics of the Holy Apostle Peter at the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople was in itself a blessing, since Saint Peter is a central figure of Christianity as the Apostle of confession, a witness of the Resurrection and a sign of hope for all Christians. This gift from our brother Pope Francis is a new milestone on the road to coming closer together. As His Holiness wrote in a fraternal letter to our Modesty, his profound desire was

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“that some fragments of the relics of the Apostle Peter be placed beside the relics of the Apostle Andrew, who is venerated as the heavenly patron of the Church of Constantinople.” The fact that brothers Peter and Andrew are reunited once again through the presence of their holy relics encourages us to continue with even more emphasis and hope our journey toward the desired unity.

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers,

We thank you most heartedly for your visit and for your contribution to our common good fight. Please convey our warm fraternal greetings and our most sincere thanks to His Holiness Pope Francis. May the Almighty and All-Merciful God, through the prayers of the Holy brothers Apostles Peter and Andrew, bless and sustain our common efforts in the restoration of communion between our two sister Churches.