

SPEECH OF PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS

Istanbul, July 25, 1967

Your Holiness and well beloved brother in Christ,

Glory to God the author of every marvel, who has deemed us worthy today, us and the hierarchy, the clergy and the people around us, linked in our prayer with our holy brothers, the chiefs of the local Orthodox churches and the venerated brothers of the other Christian churches, to receive with boundless love and very great honour Your Holiness, dear and venerated, you who have come here to bring the kiss of ancient Rome to its younger sister.

Be welcome, very holy successor of Peter, who have come here to bring the kiss of ancient Rome to its younger sister.

Be welcome, very holy successor of Peter, who have Paul's name and his conduct, as a messenger of charity, union and peace.

Within the bosom of the Church we give you the kiss of the love of Christ.

The Apostles Peter and Andrew, who were brothers, are glad with us, and in their joy are joined the choir of the holy Fathers of the setting sun and of the rising sun, of north and of south, who consumed themselves in the witness of the undivided Church's common faith and in the sanctification of their concelebration in its bosom, as well as with all those generations who have aspired to see this day.

We thank you for this great gesture on behalf of our dear country and of our Church.

Very holy brother,

Descending in peace from the Mount of Olives as from a first degree of conciliation, and taking the road toward Emmaus, walking along with the risen Lord and longing for the breaking of the bread, we have pursued our road until today, carrying on a dialogue in charity. Our hearts were burning and the Lord has not left us.

According to his truthful words, " Behold, I am with you " (Matthew 28, 20) He has led us stage by stage and has confronted us with the unhappy signs of our common history. He has ordered us to raise from between us, from the midst of the Church and from its very memory, the curtain of separation. That is what we have done as far as our weakness allowed.

But He who gives far beyond whatever we can conceive, our common and only Lord, has blessed and increased the measure of His gifts to His Church and to us ourselves. And see how, contrary to every human expectation, we have among us the Bishop of Rome, the first in honour among us, "he who presides in charity" (Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans, preface, Greek Fathers 5, 801).

And here are both of us, facing our common and holy responsibility toward the Church and the world.

Henceforth, whither and how will we continue along our route ?

Both the goal and the paths that lead to it are in the hands of God. But it is not I, it is the Lord who says " may all be one " (John 17, 21).

Obedient to His words and to His will, we are moving toward the union of all, toward the full communion of charity and of faith, coming to pass in the concelebration of the common chalice of Christ, in the impatient expectation and the hope of Him who will come to consummate the times and history in judging the living and the dead.

How will we pursue our road?

According to us, in the disposition of the conscience and of the will of all Catholics and Orthodox, marked on both parts by manifestations of the hierarchy, of the clergy and of the faithful, whose voice in these times is a precious guide and a consolation.

In thus pursuing our road, we humbly believe we are replying to the exigencies — unavoidable at the present hour — of a history of which God remains the master.

Called to be servants of the Lord of His Church and of the whole world, let us collaborate then in the design of God, who leaves the 99 sheep to save the one of them who strayed (Matthew 18, 11) and toward whom we are held to a common care and a common witness.

However, let us begin with ourselves. Let us make every possible sacrifice and suppress mutually, with a total abnegation, all that in the past seemed to contribute to the Church's integrity but which in reality ended by creating a division difficult to surmount. Let us build the Body of Christ in reuniting what is divided and in bringing together again what is scattered (Liturgy of St. Basil).

Let us then apply ourselves, by reciprocal gestures of the Churches, where it is possible, to reuniting what is divided, in the firm recognition of the common points of the Faith and of canonical regulations. Let us thus conduct the theological dialogue according to the principle of the full community of what is fundamental for the Faith and for the liberty of a theological, spiritual and creative thought, inspired by the common Fathers, in the diversity of local usage admitted by the Church from its beginnings.

So doing, we will have in view not only the unity of our two holy Churches but also a higher service: to offer ourselves together to all other dear Christian brothers as examples and artisans in the accomplishment of the whole will of the Lord, which is to reach the union of all so that the world may believe that Christ was sent by God.

But there is more. We have in view all those who believe in a God, Creator of man and of the universe, and, in collaborating with them, we will serve all men without distinction of race, creed or opinion, to promote the good of peace in the world and to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

Full of such sentiments and of such thoughts, we salute Your Holiness' arrival in the East as a new dawn of Rome and of Constantinople, of the Roman Catholic world and the Orthodox world, of all Christianity and of the whole of mankind.

May you be blessed, brother, who have come in the name of the Lord.