

*(original text in Italian)*

Focolare Movement

The President

Rocca di Papa, 11 December 2017

To the esteemed Dean of the Sophia University Institute, Monsignor Piero Coda,

God's action in the historic meetings that took place between Chiara Lubich and Patriarch Athenagoras is always close to my heart. Given that you have always recognised the importance of Patriarch Athenagoras in the journey towards Christian unity, it is a great joy, therefore, that the *International Ecumenical Chair of Studies* in their names is being established at the Sophia University Institute.

My special gratitude goes to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Bartholomew I, who, following in the footsteps of his esteemed predecessor and with his theological vision and tireless action in favour of dialogue, has given a decisive contribution in making this possible.

In addition, I warmly welcome His Eminence Gennadios Zervos, the Metropolitan Bishop of Italy and Malta, who is representing Patriarch Bartholomew and delivering the inaugural address.

I congratulate the Dean and the faculty for having so competently and fervently prepared for this long-awaited occasion, which was formally agreed when His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew received the honorary doctorate in the Culture of Unity.

This academic project represents an important step in the ongoing ecumenical relationships between the Sister Churches of East and West and opens up fascinating opportunities for respectful dialogue, which promise to be even more enriching in mutual exchange at the level of theological reflection and the anthropology of communion.

This prophetic commitment to promote unity, to which Patriarch Athenagoras and Chiara Lubich gave far-sighted witness, was as authentic as it was innovative since it involved coherence between life and thought. Their prophetic commitment laid down a light-filled pathway for research by new generations in the Chair of Studies being established today at Sophia.

In Mary's 'Yes', as Mother and Teacher who both heard and lived the Word, I greet all those present and encourage both students and teachers to move forward trustingly, allowing yourselves to be surprised by what God in our midst will wish to achieve.

Maria Voce