

Press Release – October 19, 2015

## **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I awarded an honorary doctoral degree in the culture of unity**

*From the Sophia University Institute for “his service to the unity of the human family”*

*On October 26, 2015, at 17.00hrs, at the Auditorium of the Loppiano International Centre – Direct internet transmission.*

**His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople will be receiving the first honorary doctoral degree in the culture of unity conferred by the Sophia University Institute**, situated in Loppiano (Florence) and founded by Chiara Lubich to deal competently and effectively with the cultural transition taking place. The ceremony will be held on October 26 at 17.00 hrs at the Auditorium of the international Centre of the Focolari.

The Patriarch, **a pioneer in ecumenical dialogue and a peacemaker**, is a point of reference in the complex contemporary scene. During some recent important historical events, he stood out for his leading role in promoting unity on several fronts. On May 25, 2014, at the end of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he joined Pope Francis in signing a declaration to confirm their respective churches' commitment “*towards unity for which Christ, our Lord prayed to the Father so ‘that all may be one’*”. On June 8, 2014 he was at the Vatican together with President Mahmoud Abbas and President Shimon Peres to pray with the Pope for peace in the Holy Land. Bartholomew I is known for his spiritual environmental leadership. His teachings on the environment have been widely quoted by Pope Francis in his encyclical “*Laudato si’*”. The Patriarch has been invited to address the assembly during the ecumenical service at Notre Dame Cathedral on December 3, at the time when the United Nations Climate Change Conference will be taking place in Paris.

**Recommendation for the award of PhD. H.C.** – The theologian Piero Coda, President of the University Institute said: “*Today, the world needs people who seek the unity of the human family, and the Patriarch is constantly rendering a valuable service towards a culture that aims at placing fraternity at the heart of human history*”. The recommendation specifies that: “*The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is accredited for his active leading role in the ecumenical journey towards full Christian unity and in the dialogue with people of different beliefs and religions. He distinguishes himself for promoting justice, peace and protection of the environment, in conformity with the vision on humanity, history and the universe, that comes from the treasured spiritual and theological Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition*”.

**The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the Focolare Movement** – It all began with a meeting between [Patriarch Athenagoras I and Chiara Lubich](#). “*It was June 13, 1967*”-Lubich related- “*The Patriarch welcomed me as if he had always known me and he asked me about the Movement’s contacts with the Lutherans and the Anglicans*”. Between 1967 and 1972, Athenagoras met the founder of the Focolare Movement 23 times, and thus she became the messenger between Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch. This relationship continued with his successor, Demetrio I.

Contacts with the current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I continue in the same spirit of spiritual friendship. His Holiness Bartholomew I, who visited Chiara Lubich at the Gemelli hospital a few days before her passing away on March 14, 2008 said: “*I wanted to come here to give my personal greetings and those of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople to dearest Chiara, who, through her life, has given and gives so much to the Church. I gave her my blessing with gratitude. I am happy to have met her.*” Two years later, when he welcomed Maria Voce, the newly elected president of the Focolare Movement at the Phanar, he said “*I thank God for your friendship, your visit, the fruits of your Movement, and for the continuation of this work of God that gives glory to His name*”.

This event takes place when Loppiano celebrates the first 50 years of its foundation, and it continues to strengthen the relationship of esteem and collaboration between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Focolare Movement.

A direct internet transmission of the event may be followed on [www.loppiano.it](http://www.loppiano.it)

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