

Press Release – October 27, 2015

«Offer the world a culture of unity in diversity»

Patriarch Bartholomew I receives the first Doctoral degree h.c. awarded by the Sophia University Institute
Pope Francis's message to his «beloved brother»

The conferral of the Doctoral degree h.c. in the Culture of unity to His Holiness Bartholomew I was held at the Auditorium of Loppiano, the small town of the Focolare Movement where the Sophia University Institute is located. This ceremony has brought together 1400 people, with delegations and personalities from different European and Middle East countries and various Churches: the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Orthodox Churches, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformists, Waldensian, Adventists, Catholics. It was followed through a live internet transmission.

«We accept this honour with deep emotion; we want to extend it to all our martyred Church of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, that presides in charity over the symphony of all the Holy Orthodox Churches». Patriarch Bartholomew's speech for this occasion began with these words. While referring to the Pope's message, read by Card. Giuseppe Betori, Archbishop of Florence, he continued, *“ This honour is even greater because of the message sent to us by our beloved Brother, the Bishop of Ancient Rome, Pope Francis”.*

In his message, Pope Francis sent special greetings to his *«beloved brother Bartholomew»* and expressed his joy saying that this initiative *«besides being a rightful recognition of this commitment to the promotion of the culture of unity, contributes favourably to the common journey of our churches towards full and visible unity, to which we tend with dedication and perseverance».* Addressing the Sophia University Institute, he said *«I wish that the Sophia University Institute, following the charism of the Focolare Movement and remaining open to the action of the Spirit, may continue to be a place of encounter and dialogue between different cultures and religions».*

In her address to Patriarch Bartholomew, Maria Voce highlighted that *«his concern for sister Churches, together with his care for the precious theological and spiritual Eastern Christian tradition, his commitment towards the pan-orthodox Synod, and his repeated meetings with Popes in the last decades, have contributed towards a more dense network of relationships. This explains the Pope's explicit recognition of deep friendship and shared intentDialogue is our common priority»* concluded Maria Voce.

The President Piero Coda stated: *« We admire in You and in the process of synodical discernment, an active presence of the Orthodox Church in the world thanks to Your personal and authoritative leadership of love, the flourishing - in tune with today's deep issues and as a soothing and invigorating balm to heal the wounds that plague the body of humanity - of that two thousand year old liturgical, mystical, theological, aesthetic, social and ecological tradition, that has been so faithfully passed on along the centuries, while enriching itself immensely through the life and creativity of our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters».*

On this occasion Patriarch Bartholomew gave a very inspiring *lectio magistralis*, he spoke deeply about a subject, very dear to him: unity in diversity. *«Diversity does not shatter the charism of unity in its holiness, in its trinitarian relational aspect. Diversity is not an antagonistic action, but it is the fruition of salvation in the theandric relationship of the two natures, united but not confused. Understanding the principle of diversity as a richness, becomes a possibility to understand and be understood, made one in Christ. The prospect we must offer the world to believe and be saved is to form a culture of unity in diversity».*

Loppiano has lived a day with a taste of history. The conferral of this doctoral degree h.c continues to strengthen the bond of spiritual relationship that has existed between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Focolare Movement for almost fifty years and it launches new prospects of dialogue on a cultural and academic level.

Victoria Gómez (+39) 335 7003675 – Benjamim Ferreira (+39) 348 4754063