

## **World Council of Churches Honors Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: 'Highly Respected Global Moral Voice'**



### **Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate**

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has just received the Ecumenical Award of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria “in recognition of his contribution to the Ecumenical Dialogue, that is, the effort to bring Christian Churches closer together.” At the ceremony in Munich on June 6, 2025, Bishop Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, President of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), delivered a heartfelt tribute to the Ecumenical Patriarch that beautifully expressed some of His All-Holiness’ innumerable accomplishment in nearly thirty-four years as the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

Bedford-Strohm stated that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew “is a patriarch with a global vision and gentle strength. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is described as modest yet courageous, gentle yet determined, intellectually brilliant, pastorally compassionate, and ecologically prophetic.” The WCC leader also noted that the Ecumenical Patriarch “is also a bridge builder, a moral compass, a defender of the voiceless and, above all, a servant leader who is deeply rooted in the Orthodox

tradition yet radically open to the world.”

Stressing the crucial importance of the presence of the Orthodox Church within the WCC, Bedford-Strohm added: “Orthodoxy is not an addition to the WCC — it is part of its soul. For the Ecumenical Patriarch, the smallest and most vulnerable members of the community play a special role.”

Enumerating several of His All-Holiness’ tireless activities on behalf of the most marginalized, Bedford-Strohm said that the Ecumenical Patriarch “has actively collaborated with UNICEF and the World Council of Churches to combat child poverty, child trafficking, and exploitation. Patriarch Bartholomew sees the relational nature of human existence not only in terms of relationships between people, but also in terms of the relationship between humans and nature.”

Bedford-Strohm also praised His All-Holiness for his pioneering commitment to protection of the environment. “It is,” said the WCC Central Committee President, “a sacred reality, a divine gift, a creation that sings of God’s glory. The idea of creation has always played a central role in Orthodox theology.”

In light of all this, Bedford-Strohm said, the Ecumenical Patriarch “is a globally respected ecumenical voice. This has also required a great deal of courage.” He pointed out that His All-Holiness’ “efforts have often been viewed with suspicion by those who fear that dialogue will water down tradition. And yet he persists—not because ecumenism is a trend, but because it is following Christ.”

Above all, said Bedford-Strohm, His All-Holiness “speaks not only as the spiritual leader of the Orthodox world, but as a global conscience.” As such, “when we honor him, we are not simply honoring a church leader. We are honoring a vision: of humanity reconciled with creation, of churches reconciled with one another, and of a world that still believes in justice and mercy.”

Bedford-Strohm’s encomium followed the March 10-11, 2023 visit of WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. Dr. Pillay’s trip to the Phanar was his first official visit as WCC general secretary. “This first meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,” he explained, “was a great encouragement to me personally in my leadership, an inspirational encounter with a church leader truly ecumenical, and a reconfirmation of the deep commitment of the Patriarchate to strengthen and vitalize the WCC fellowship at all levels.”

On that occasion, Dr. Pillay also said: “We are deeply determined to work together for unity and reconciliation regardless of the challenges of the times, with the

Gospel at the core and as the foundation of this common commitment, with courage, sharing our witness for the care of God's creation."

Echoing the Ecumenical Patriarch's oft-stated commitment to dialogue between Christians of different traditions, as well as with non-Christians, Dr. Pillay added: "WCC will never abandon dialogue. Truth must never fear dialogue, which is at the core of the council's mission. On the basis of mutual understanding and faith-based diplomacy we are ready to prepare for our member churches the spaces that will facilitate them to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness. We are in a position of introducing and accompanying them as well in the international organizations platforms, to be used at their benefit raising awareness on topics of their specific interest."

Dr. Pillay also spoke out about the closure of the Theological School of Halki: "This is a clear case of Christians living in a context where the Christian community is experiencing a decline in their members and carries a cross, struggling to maintain its religious rights. The reopening of Halki is directly connected to the right of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to secure its continuity and future on these grounds, and to ensure the formation of its younger generation. It is a pity that such great facilities in the school cannot be used to its full to continue with the original intention for Christian unity and ecumenical endeavors."

The Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate congratulate the WCC and the Catholic Academy of Bavaria on the wisdom of their decision to honor His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, one of the most consequential and courageous figures of our troubled age.

Photo: Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

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