08/12/2025

The Ecumenical Patriarchate Commemorated the 60th Anniversary of the Lifting of the Anathemas



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided on Sunday, 7 December, in the Most Sacred Patriarchal Church at the Divine Liturgy, at the conclusion of which a Doxology was offered marking the 60th anniversary of the signing of the mutual lifting of the Anathemas of 1054 by the late Pope Paul VI and the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras.

Concelebrating with His All-Holiness were Their Eminences: Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon, Elder Metropolitan Apostolos of Derkoi, Elder Metropolitan Dimitrios of the Princes' Islands, Metropolitan Meliton of Philadelphia, Metropolitan Eirinaios of Myriophytos and Peristasis, Metropolitan Theoliptos of Iconium, Metropolitan Stephanos of Kallioupolis and Madytos, Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonia, Metropolitan Maximos of Selyvria, Metropolitan Ierotheos of Lemnos and Agios Efstratios, Metropolitan Ioakeim of Bursa, and Metropolitan Theodoros of Seleucia.

Immediately after, in his homily, His All-Holiness referred to the recent official visit of Pope Leo XIV to the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and their joint pilgrimage to Nicaea on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council held there in 325. He added:

"In the same spirit, we gather again today to honour and celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the mutual lifting of the anathemas of 1054 by the late Pope Paul VI and our ever-memorable predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, on 7 December 1965.



In a period of increasing polarization across the world, including within the Christian oikoumene, this timely and prophetic step toward unity deserves particular attention and study. In their Common Declaration, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras extended a decisive and sincere invitation to a new way of relationship between our Sister Churches, not on the basis of 'offensive words, unfounded accusations, and blameworthy gestures,' but 'through the purification of hearts, the rejection of historical wrongs, and the firm resolve to arrive at a common understanding and expression of the apostolic faith and its demands.' The mutual lifting of the anathemas of 1054 served as a concrete sign and proof of this new beginning and gave significant impetus to the dialogue of love, to which was added the indispensable dialogue of truth through the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue."

Elsewhere in his address, His All-Holiness referred to the ever-memorable Elder

Metropolitan John of Pergamon, highlighting the importance of continuing the dialogue aimed at restoring unity:

“The late theologian and pioneer of the Joint International Commission, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, understood profoundly the urgent need for mutual respect and the rediscovery of one another. ‘East, where is your West?’ he wrote. ‘West, where is your East?’ Sadly, today we observe growing indifference toward the necessity of our work. We are enticed by the idea of self-isolation, mutual suspicion, and mistrust. But we cannot abandon the goal of unity under the pressure of complacency or the temptation of fanaticism. We must recognise these dangers and work diligently to avoid them.

As Metropolitan John wrote, ‘To abandon the effort and allow the path to become overgrown with thorny brambles would mean a return to the estranged past.’ Let us not permit these thorns to grow and choke the dialogue. If we fail to guard against this, we will not only be unable to reap shared fruits in the future, but we will also jeopardise the precious fruit already produced by our venerable Predecessors. Instead, let us consciously cultivate respect, honour, and above all mutual love, so that every encounter and communication, long or short, visible or hidden, may become a source of spiritual exchange, a communion of life, and thus a tangible step toward unity.”



Present were the Very Reverend Arnaud du Cheyron de Beaumont, representing

the Apostolic Nuncio to Turkey; the Reverend Fr. Vartan Kirakos Kazanciyan, Administrator of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy in Turkey; and Mr Lucian Abalintoaiei, Secretary General of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops in Turkey.

Also in attendance were Their Graces Bishops Adrianos of Halicarnassus, Kassianos of Aravissos, and Paisios of Xanthoupolis; Ambassador Konstantinos Koutras, Consul General of Greece in Constantinople; the Consuls General of Ukraine, Mr Roman Nedilskyi, and of Moldova, Mr Sergiu Gurduza, with their wives; clergy; and a large number of faithful from Constantinople and pilgrims from abroad.

It is recalled that on the 10th anniversary of the lifting of the anathemas, on 7 December 1975, in an unexpected gesture of profound symbolism, the late Pope Paul VI knelt and kissed the feet of the head of the Patriarchal delegation sent to the Vatican for the commemorative events, the ever-memorable Elder Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon. Deeply moved and astonished, Metropolitan Meliton remarked that “only a great man, or a saint, could make such a gesture.”

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou

vema.com.au