

MESSAGE

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
To the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, South Korea
(30 October – 8 November, 2013)

Beloved brothers and sisters of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches,

We greet you from the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in “the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” We are with you in spirit and prayer as you gather from all parts of the world, calling upon the “God of life to lead us to justice and peace.”

The commitment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the vision of the World Council of Churches – from the very beginning through the more contentious periods – has been *unwavering*. Indeed, our personal dedication to the World Council of Churches is amply evident in our extensive participation in executive roles and responsibilities over many decades. More recently, we spoke at the Council’s 60th anniversary and addressed the last Central Committee in Crete in 2012.

i) Justice and Peace as Purpose:

The theme of this 10th Assembly appropriately encompasses **purpose**, **perspective**, and **prayer**. It comprises our vision and target in ecumenical activity, our attitude and approach in ecumenical action, but also the divine gift and blessing for ecumenical integrity.

In praying for the “God of life to lead us to justice and peace,” we must *renew our commitment to the essential vision* of the World Council of Churches to confess the Lord Jesus Christ and glorify the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can never separate issues of social consequence from those of theological significance; we cannot isolate challenges to human rights from dialogue about religious doctrine. Our doctrine should inform our life; our Creed should conform to our Liturgy; or, to adopt the language of the programs of the World Council of Churches, our “faith” should complement our “order.”

ii) Justice and Peace as Perspective:

Furthermore, in praying that the “God of life may lead us to justice and peace,” we *recall that justice and peace must accompany every program that we initiate, every aspect of our mission*, as well as our effort to care for “the least of our brothers and sisters,” in accordance with our Lord’s commission in Matthew 25. Moreover, with the words of the Orthodox Liturgy, we “pray for the peace of the whole world and for the unity of all,” particularly the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. Most especially, we remember our brothers and sisters struggling for justice and peace in the Middle East.

This is surely what informs our responsibility and accountability before critical problems of global importance, such as economy and ecology. We cannot remain idle spectators in a world pervaded by social injustice and plagued by suffering and oppression. There can be no comfortable way of sitting on the Cross. The words "economy" and "ecology" reveal that the world is our home, our *oikos*; thus, everyone and everything are our intimate family, our brother and sister, our flesh and blood, beyond racial and religious differences. This is the foundation of our social and ecological justice, measured by our compassion toward the poorest of all people and the most vulnerable of God's creatures.

iii) Justice and Peace as Prayer:

In praying that the "God of life may lead us to justice and peace," we humbly *recognize our dependence on God's mercy for reconciliation and healing* among ourselves, with other people, and in all of creation. The truth is that we are on a journey toward justice and peace; ecumenism is rightly called a "movement." It is this notion of pilgrimage that uniquely distinguishes the Christian way.

This means, dear participants, that we are obliged to work toward visible unity, a goal that still eludes us despite the Lord's prayer in the Gospel of John, that His "disciples may be one." We must remind ourselves and one another that communion (*koinonia*) is not just a sociological term describing the work that we do together. It is primarily a sacramental term defining our relationships as member-churches. As such, the vision of *koinonia* should never be diminished or disregarded simply because it complicates our cooperation. On the contrary, it should compel us as disciples of the living God to a model of ecclesiastical coexistence and collaboration. We must patiently and persistently explore the causes of our historical and theological divisions so that our diversity is not a scandal to the world but the ground for rejoicing and reconciliation.

iv. Our Common Journey Beyond the Assembly:

As we consider the tasks before the Assembly and anticipate the decisions beyond Busan, we have the following reflections to offer:

- a) We value the growing cooperation between the WCC and its member churches. Indeed, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is committed to such collaboration. We must never forget that all our efforts and activities are only instruments that serve *the unity of the church* as the ultimate vision of the ecumenical movement and all its institutional expressions.
- b) We welcome the initiative of the WCC to enlarge its membership. Yet, our primary commitment is to the WCC as the only global ecumenical organization with broad Orthodox participation and Orthodox expectation.
- c) We recognize the new roles of the WCC within the rapidly changing ecclesial and ecumenical landscape, but we expect the Council, especially the Faith and Order Commission, to continue to lead the multilateral theological dialogues and assist churches in their sacred task of calling one another to visible unity.

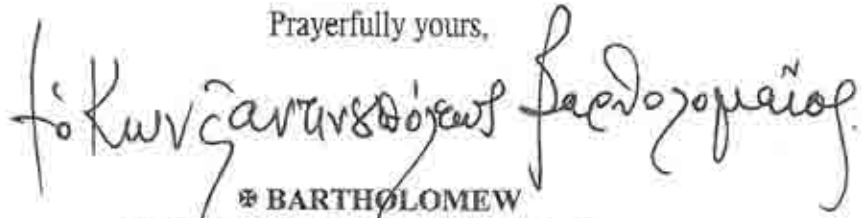
d) We appreciate the Council's presence in international advocacy and are grateful for its ongoing solidarity with member-churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate. But we wish to see similar prominence in the search for common witness in our contemporary world, the ecumenical formation of our younger generation, relationships with the Roman Catholic Church and other non-member churches – namely, in all areas that strengthen Christian unity and further promote interfaith dialogue.

Beloved participants of the 10th Assembly,

May your encounter in Busan be the source of renewal for our churches and our "life together in faith, hope, and love." May it pave the way for respect and compassion toward every human being so that all people may be welcomed, honored, and embraced as unique pieces of a sacred puzzle constituting the marvelous mystery of God's wonderful creation. May God bless this Assembly and your deliberations.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the 15th of October, 2013

Prayerfully yours,



✠ BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch

