

Orthodox-Catholic meeting for an integral ecology

Halki Summit V

Angela Caliaro

As we left for the Halki Summit V in Turkey from June 8th – 11th, we were stunned to realize it would fall between the Catholic and Orthodox feasts of Pentecost! We knew that the ‘feast day’ (Saint Bartholomew) of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I would take place during the meeting but this Pentecost surprise seemed a further confirmation of the Holy Spirit at work.

Collaboration for Summit V had its roots back in January 2019, when the then abbot of the Holy Trinity monastery on the island of Halki, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, expressed the desire for collaboration between the Focolare Movement and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. That same evening at the Phanar, the seat of the Patriarchate, Bartholomew I blessed this initiative. Thus, this fifth Halki Summit was jointly organized with Focolare’s Sophia University Institute (IUS).

In the hall of the Summit hung an eloquent image of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis, with the words, "Sustaining the Future of the Planet Together". Focolare president Margaret Karram and IUS vice-grand chancellor, Msgr. Vincenzo Zani (Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education) were present, as well as the then IUS rector, Giuseppe Argiolas. Also participating were Msgr. Piero Coda and Metropolitan Maximos of Selyvria, joint directors of the Patriarch Athenagoras-Chiara Lubich Ecumenical Chair at Sophia University Institute. A number of Orthodox and Catholic professors from Greece, Crete, the USA and Italy, and students from various interdisciplinary and ecumenical backgrounds, also participated.

After the apostolic nuncio to Turkey, Msgr. Marek Solczyński, read the message of Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew gave the heartfelt and important keynote address. In his introduction, he mentioned the unique nature of the Patriarch Athenagoras-Chiara Lubich Chair. Then the Patriarch spoke of shared responsibility for the future and reiterated that only together can we adequately respond to the ecological crisis. It was a reflection on our Christian vocation: to create and strengthen connections that transform the world. The Summit itself proved to be an experience of this reality.

Two concepts that came into relief during the Patriarch’s address are very dear to Orthodox theology and spirituality: "Eucharist" ("thanksgiving" for the gift of creation) and "Asceticism" ("self-control" of consumerist passions). Bartholomew invited participants to consider these concepts not only from a liturgical or monastic perspective, but as diverse ways to speak of *communion*:

And here is where the vision of our brother Pope Francis coincides with the worldview we have proposed and promulgated for over thirty years. Both of us are convinced that what we do to our world “we do unto the least of our brothers and sisters” (Mt 25.40), just as what we do unto others we do to God Himself (Mt. 25.45).

Important presentations followed from diverse geopolitical, theological, spiritual, educational, ecumenical, and ecological perspectives. There was profound attention and communion, with a free and open exchange of gifts substantiated by reflection, research and shared ecclesial journeys. It was

an experience of being true brothers and sisters, one that further reinforced our desire to work together. One participant noted: "In speaking about care for creation, our desire for unity among our sister Churches grew as well."

Solemn vespers were celebrated on the feast of Saint Bartholomew and there were powerful moments such as at the tomb of Patriarch Athenagoras I. The Patriarch's passion for unity – so shared by Chiara Lubich – continues to be a source of inspiration and concrete commitment.

A final incisive statement drafted by the Summit participants was released at the conclusion:

"We, the participants at the Fifth Halki Summit entitled "Sustaining the Future of the Planet Together" – an international and interdisciplinary conference co-organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Sophia University Institute, inspired by the prophetic magisterium of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis – wish to appeal to our Churches and to all those who care about our common home:

The sincere communication and mutual attentiveness, as well as the open exchange of ecclesial approaches and reflections experienced throughout our summit (June 8–11, 2022), have led us to discover that we are at a decisive turning point for the future of the human family, in which our Churches are called to play an essential educational role through the "Global Compact on Education."

The challenge or opportunity to which we are called is that of developing a shared ecological ethos. As artisans of peace and fraternity, we seek to implement good practices, committing ourselves to work on interdisciplinary pathways for the formation of new paradigms that can interpret and transform reality. In this way, we aspire to overcome the culture of waste, knowing that what we do to our world "we also do to the least of our brothers and sisters" (Mt 25.40).

Therefore, with conviction and gratitude we embrace the exhortation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: "Always remember that our vocation as Christians is about making and reinforcing connections between ourselves and all of God's creation, between our faith and our action, between our theology and our spirituality, between what we say and what we do, between science and religion, between our beliefs and every discipline, between our sacramental communion and our social consciousness, between our generation and the generations to come, just as between heaven and earth, between our two churches, but also with other churches and other faith communities."