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Benedict XVI's Ecumenical Dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Church*

The author of this article presents Benedict XVI's ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Church as a whole through the speeches, declarations, and homilies that he delivered to representatives of the Eastern Church. This dialogue is undoubtedly significant. As a pope, Benedict XVI fostered and authoritatively promoted this interchange by initiating meetings, participating in communal prayer, teaching, treating those who he encountered with fraternal friendship and charity, and overcoming various obstacles. The Holy Father emphasized the theological studies that the two Churches share in common, because complete and visible communion cannot exist without unity of faith. As always – and particularly as the theologian and as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – he taught that both Churches could celebrate the Eucharist together only when they are fully united. When would this happen? According to Benedict XVI, such union is a gift from God for which the faithful must pray and toward which they must work by: evangelizing together, mutually resisting ideologies hostile to Christianity and humanity, ensuring peace and justice among Christians and those who follow other religions, and cooperating in charitable care of the poor, the sick, and the needy.

Key words: ecumenical dialogue, path toward unity, fraternity, ancient Christian tradition, Orthodox Church, ecumenical collaboration.

Introduction

This article completes the study published in *Warsaw Theological Studies* (*Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne*, WST) journal entitled “With

* The papal speeches, homilies, declarations included in this article are from the Vatican website

Benedict XVI Toward Complete Christian Unity.” My original intention was to present the Holy Father’s addresses to representatives of all churches and Christian denominations. However, due to the large number of primary sources, I limited the scope of that article to Benedict XVI’s addresses to Protestants. In this article, I will demonstrate Benedict XVI’s contributions to dialogue with the Orthodox Church. During his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI gave more than twenty speeches to the delegations of the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Germany, and the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He also signed two common declarations: one with Bartholomew I, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the other with Chrysostom II, the Archbishop of Cyprus.

Certainly, one can raise the question whether these speeches mention issues regarding ecumenical dialogue that are important from the theological point of view. Needless to say, these speeches are less authoritative than, for example, encyclicals or other official Church documents and, naturally, are more diplomatic. Can they, therefore, be an important source for theological studies? And, could studies based on these addresses be ranked highly?

Ecumenism

A similar study on Benedict XVI’s papal addresses and speeches can adequately present his contribution to ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox Church by showing the means he uses to foster discourse with the other party. In addition, one can learn the elements of effective dialogue and what course this dialogue should take. It is important to note here that Benedict XVI sought to achieve an integral dialogue, meaning discourse that is not strictly theological or conducted between religious leaders, but rather a dialogue between the different faithful communities, in a word: church-wide dialogue. By examining the Holy Father’s addresses and speeches, it will be possible to determine whether the Holy Father achieved this kind of dialogue and how he promoted it.

The Path Toward Full Christian Unity

This study will not present an exhaustive history of ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Rather, it will refer to the statements that Benedict XVI made in his speeches and addresses. According to Benedict XVI, dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches began with Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras. These two men met in Jerusalem and lifted their mutual

excommunications of 1054 on December 7, 1964, the day before the end of the Council and the delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople's participation in the last session of the Council. Since then, the Western and Eastern Churches remained in contact: Patriarchate delegations were sent to Rome for the celebration of the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, while, in turn, Vatican delegations visited Constantinople for the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle. Dimitrios I and Bartholomew I, the Patriarchs of Constantinople, also paid official visits to Rome, and St. John Paul II, likewise, visited Constantinople. In 1979, the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue was established to address, discuss, and further develop important issues.

The ecumenical movement grew stronger and entered more deeply into the communities of both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, which was manifested in their increasing participation in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Pope Benedict XVI considered the resumption of Catholic-Orthodox dialogue on a global scale one of the most important achievements of his pontificate.¹ He personally received in Rome the Patriarch Bartholomew I; the Archbishops of Cyprus and Greece; and other leaders of the ancient Eastern Churches who are in union—albeit not fully—with the Catholic Church. He also visited Constantinople (2006), Cyprus (2010), and Jerusalem (2009), where he met with the leaders of the Orthodox Churches. Benedict XVI and his predecessors' meetings with the patriarchs and other representatives of the Orthodox Churches confirm the Holy See's strong commitment to pursuing full Christian unity. This process has been long and difficult that was initially accompanied by fear and hesitation on both sides, which were able to overcome hesitation and prejudice. With time, the hope of engaging in a sound "dialogue of truth" increased along with theological and historical clarifications, which brought about measurable results.

Benedict XVI has always turned to the Bible to substantiate dialogue. When welcoming the Patriarch of Constantinople's delegation that was sent for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul for the first time,² he greeted the delegation with St. Paul's words to the Philippians (2:2-5), who St. Paul

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address of the Holy Father at the Ecumenical Encounter in the Holy Trinity Church in Warsaw," May 25, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060525_incontro-ecumenico.html.

² Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in Rome," June 30, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050630_deleg-costantinopoli.html.

encouraged to be of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, to avoid selfishness or vainglory, and to humbly regard others as more important than themselves just like Christ. The respective Orthodox and Catholic delegations that were sent to Rome for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul and to Constantinople for the Feast of St. Andrew testify to both parties' mutual resolve to combat the desires of the flesh (Gal 5: 14-23), which tend to divide believers, and to strive to live according to the Spirit, which increases charity between the Churches.

Both visits demonstrated that faith works primarily through charity (Gal 5:6). Since Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras met on the Mount of Olives and lifted their mutual excommunications, which subsequently brought about a radical change in relations between the two Churches, a fruitful dialogue between the Western and Eastern Churches. This is not to say, however, that all of the positive consequences of this progress have been exhausted³.

Benedict XVI was interested primarily in engaging in intense theological dialogue within the International Theological Commission, and he expressed this intention many times. He mentioned it at meetings with representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Commission. Even during the first meeting with the Patriarchate delegation, he indicated that every effort should be made to ensure that theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which officially began in 1980, resumed with a new dynamism.⁴ He expressed his appreciation to Bartholomew I for his efforts to recommence the International Theological Commission's work and assured him of his support in this endeavor.

Pope Benedict XVI often encouraged dialogue by indicating that he was looking to the future. For example, in his address to the members of the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in June 2006, he indicated that ecumenical dialogue would resume and enter into a new phase during the plenary session to be held in Belgrade in September of the same year.⁵ And so, in joint Declaration, he expressed his joy that the Theological Commission had resumed its work in a spirit

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration," November 30, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061130_dichiarazione-comune.html.

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the delegation sent by Bartholomew I, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Holy Synod," June 30, 2005.

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Members of the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople," June 29, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060629_costantinopoli.html.

of friendship and cooperation after a hiatus that had lasted several years due to various difficulties. This particular Theological Commission considered the ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the church within the broader topic of ecclesial communion, conciliarity, and authority on the local, regional, and universal level. Addressing the members of the International Theological Commission, who had gathered in Rome to discuss the structure and mission of the Church, Benedict XVI emphasized that dialogue on this issue was very important for the restoration of full communion and that the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches “share an ecclesial patrimony stemming from apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity. This ‘heritage of experience’ should shape our future ‘guiding our common path towards the re-establishment of full communion’ (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 56).”⁶ On the occasion of the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2011, the Pope received the Commission in Rome⁷ and highlighted how it had resumed working together in January 2003, after the hiatus. He recalled that the document “Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church” was the fruit of the first stage of dialogue that took place from 2003 to 2009. This document defined some basic ecclesiological principles that the Churches share as well as issues that would require deeper reflection during subsequent stages of discourse. In addition, Benedict XVI expressed his gratitude to God for the fact that, despite being separated from each other for more than 1,500 years, both Catholic and Orthodox theologians still agreed on the sacramental nature of the Church, apostolic succession of the priesthood, and the urgent need to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

Pope Benedict XVI also pointed out that the way to foster greater unity to consider the Commission’s historical perspective regarding the ways in which the Catholic and Orthodox Churches expressed their communion throughout the centuries along with the communion as well as the communication that existed among the Churches until the middle of the 5th century. He also expressed his hope that these studies would contribute to a deeper mutual understanding and have

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches,” February 1, 2007, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070201_catholics-orthodox.html.

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Joint International Commission,” January 28, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110128_commission-theological-dialogue.html.

a positive influence in the two Churches efforts to work toward the full communion to which the will of Christ is calling them. The leaders prayed for this intention during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.⁸ The Pope emphasized that explaining and overcoming theological differences is necessary to restore the full unity for which everyone is longing and praying.⁹ He considered a proper understanding of the primacy of Peter and the “risk of separating power (and in particular the primacy) from ministry” (*UUS*, 88).¹⁰ In the cathedral of St. George in Phanar, Benedict XVI made a similar statement using the expressions “universal responsibility” and “service of unity, a mercy which Peter himself was the first to experience (*Ut Unum Sint*, 91).”¹¹

The International Commission that met in Paphos in 2009 sought to deepen its understanding and recognition of the primacy of Peter. The Pope assured the members of the Commission of his prayers and appealed to them to examine this thoroughly the sensitive issues that is necessary to achieve full communion.¹² All of these events and documents prove that Benedict XVI followed the work of the International Theological Commission closely,¹³ and despite existing difficulties, he never lost hope that Catholics and the Orthodox would celebrate the Eucharist together as an expression of full communion in the near future.¹⁴ In turn, this communion would certainly give a more explicit and powerful testimony of Christ’s saving truth¹⁵.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address in Freiburg,” September 24, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110924_zdk-freiburg.html.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Rabczyński, “*Fides querens dialogum*, The primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the dialogue with the Churches of the East,” in: *Theology in Poland* 13.2(2019): 166-168.

¹¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Homily in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George,” November 30, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061130_divine-liturg.html.

¹² Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,” June 28, 2010, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100628_ecumenical-patriarchate.html.

¹³ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,” June 27, 2009, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090627_patr-costantinopoli.html.

¹⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: A Conversation With Peter Seewald*, Kraków 2011, 111.

¹⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,” June 28, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110628_patriarcato-ecumenico.html.

The Pope followed Catholic-Orthodox dialogue that took place not only within the International Theological Commission but also on a global scale¹⁶ closely and reiterated that the Magisterium of the Church must ultimately approve any agreements that were made during these discussions. He repeated that it is necessary to discuss and examine existing differences with all clarity and good will in order to respond to Christ's call "to build unity in charity and in truth."¹⁷ During his visit to the Congregation for Eastern Churches, Benedict XVI stated, "We have almost everything in common; and above all, we have in common the true longing for unity' (*Oriente Lumen*, n.3)." The Pope said that the Churches are also connected through the martyrs of the faith in the East who suffered to remain faithful to Christ and had a sincere desire for unity.¹⁸ At the same time, he emphasized that the pursuit of full unity was also important insofar as it concerns the restoration of the "full manifestation of the Church's catholicity (*Oriente Lumen*, n. 1)."¹⁹

In his address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Pope pointed out an extremely important observation that Fr. W. Hryniewicz had already made in the 1980s—namely, that the Theological Commission's findings did include the clergy and the faithful. He continued by asserting that ecumenical awareness should spread primarily among and between the clergy and the faithful, so that it does not remain the exclusive "property" of the bishops and theologians who are involved in direct dialogue. Therefore, theological faculties as well as the academic and didactic institutions that form pastors and catechists, should be involved in ecumenical dialogue and present the ecumenical aspects of theological issues. In their contact with each other and others, students should contribute to the ecumenical formation of new generations so that these generations do not lose the sense of their own ecclesial identity and are aware of the problems and obstacles that stand in the way of achieving full unity between the Churches, which would ultimately be expressed through

¹⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address at the Ecumenical Encounter in the Holy Trinity Church in Warsaw," May 25, 2006.

¹⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in Rome," June 30, 2005.

¹⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches," June 9, 2007, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070609_congr-orientchurch.html.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 48.

the joint celebration of the Eucharist.²⁰ The Pope recognized that Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Holy Ecumenical Synod confirmed the importance of ecumenical dialogue in their Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical issued on the occasion of the Triumph of Orthodoxy (February 21, 2010).²¹ In addition, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged that a fraternal spirit was expressed through an invitation to and the presence of an Orthodox delegation at a synod dedicated to the Middle East, because Christians in those areas face some common difficulties: they are a minority and want genuine religious freedom and peace; therefore, they greatly need to dialogue with the Muslim and Jewish communities.²²

While speaking in Warsaw,²³ Pope Benedict XVI expressed his appreciation to the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Polish Ecumenical Council for preparing an ecumenical document that presented an approved document on marriage and the family, which set forth principles for entering into interfaith marriages and indicated a specific pastoral program that includes such marriages. He emphasized the importance of these issues due to the increasing number of mixed marriages, which also poses the risk that one or both parties will leave his or her respective faith, that the family order will be disrupted, and that it will be more difficult to create an atmosphere of family unity or create the conditions necessary for the spiritual development of the children. Although significant progress and agreements have been made through ecumenical dialogue through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, everyone knows well that Christians are a long way off from achieving the unity that Christ prayed for and was present in the first Christian community in Jerusalem mentioned in the Book of Acts. Full unity is realized not only in organizational structures, but also on a much deeper level, for example, as unity expressed in “the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of the family of God” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 2). Hence, in restoring unity among divided Christians, it is not enough to acknowledge mutual differences and cease at peaceful

²⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,” June 29, 2007, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070629_costantinopoli.html.

²¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,” June 28, 2010.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Ecumenical Encounter in the Holy Trinity Church in Warsaw,” May 25, 2006.

coexistence. The Catholic Church strives for the unity that our Savior prayed for and which by its nature manifests itself in a communion of faith, sacraments, and ministry.²⁴

Early Christian Tradition Impels Ecumenical Dialogue

In his addresses, Benedict XVI emphasizes that the Orthodox Church contains something of evangelical origin—something that exists thanks to the missionary activity of the apostles and that arises from the tradition that is faithful to Christ's message. The evangelical, apostolic, ecclesial elements that the Orthodox and Catholic Church share in common are connects them. Benedict XVI also gently mentions the elements that divine the two Church in order to demonstrate that it is necessary to overcome all obstacles that stand in the way of full communion.

The Second Vatican Council expressed deep appreciation for the Eastern Churches' special role as living witnesses of the beginning of Christianity. Like John Paul II, Benedict XVI admits that the "ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church" (*Orientalis Lumen*, 1). According to Benedict, the validity of their testimony arises from the fact that "without a constant relationship with the tradition of her origins, in fact, there is no future for Christ's Church" because "[i]t is the Eastern Churches in particular which preserve the echo of the first Gospel proclamation; the most ancient memories of the signs worked by the Lord; the first reflections of the Easter light and the flickering flame of Pentecost that was never extinguished. Their spiritual patrimony, rooted in the teaching of the Apostles and Fathers, has given rise to venerable liturgical, theological and disciplinary traditions, demonstrating the capacity of the 'thought of Christ' for making cultures and history fruitful."²⁵ This is the reason why Pope Benedict XVI "regard[s] the Churches of Orthodoxy with esteem and affection."²⁶

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²⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Homily delivered during the Liturgy of Vespers for the Conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity," January 25, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110125_week-prayer.html.

²⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches," June 9, 2007.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

In turn, when giving an address in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint George,²⁷ the Pope expressed his joy in being in Constantinople—a land so closely connected to the Christian faith, where many Churches flourished in ancient times. He recalled Saint Peter’s exhortations to the early Christian communities “in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). He recalled that the early Church had produced many martyrs, theologians, pastors, monks, and holy men and women. He spoke of Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, two great saints and pastors who oversaw the See of Constantinople and who the West honors as Doctors of the Church. Their relics are enshrined in the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican and, thanks to a gift that Paul II gave to the Patriarch Bartholomew I for veneration as a sign of communion, in the Cathedral of Saint George in Istanbul. Benedict XVI also mentioned that seven of the Ecumenical Councils that Catholics consider authoritative for the faith and discipline of the Church took place in this part of the Eastern world. His address expressed his hope that the meeting would strengthen their mutual affection and renew their common commitment to persevere on the journey toward reconciliation and peace.

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At the end, Benedict XVI stated that, like a grain of wheat (Jn 12:24), the Christian message fell on that land and brought forth abundant fruit: “We must be profoundly grateful for the heritage that emerged from the fruitful encounter between the Christian message and Hellenic culture. It has had an enduring impact on the Churches of East and West. The Greek Fathers have left us a store of treasure from which the Church continues to draw riches old and new (cf. Mt 13:52).”²⁸ Welcoming Chrysostom II, the Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus, to Rome on June 16, 2007,²⁹ Benedict XVI began his speech with a greeting taken from Romans 15:5-6: that “the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant [the faithful] to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together [they] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” .

²⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Meeting with the Patriarch Bartholomew I in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint George”, November 29, 2006, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061129_bartholomew-i.html.

²⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Homily in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George,” November 30, 2006.

²⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Meeting with Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus in Rome,” June 16, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070616_chrysostomos-ii.html.

He also pointed out that the archbishop's visit was a gift from God that brought him consolation on the path to full unity. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that the faithful constantly experience God's grace, which enables them to persevere despite centuries of division, different paths, and the difficulty of treating painful wounds. God, however, does not stop guiding the Churches' steps to the path of unity and reconciliation. According to Benedict XVI, this reality is really comforting and his meeting with Chrysostom II was part of this path toward an ever deeper search for full communion, for which Christ waits and desires: *ut unum sint* (Jn 17:21).

At the meeting that occurred on June 16, 2007, the Pope also emphasized the importance of the official theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, in which the Apostolic Church of Cyprus was actively participating. He said, "Our eyes will perhaps not be able to see the longed for unity of the Church, but with the grace of the Holy Spirit we will have done our duty in time and space as peacemakers and true brothers '*ut omnes unum sint*.'"³⁰ As a result, in the Common Declaration,³¹ Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II expressed gratitude to God for their fraternal meeting in their shared faith in the Risen Christ and emphasized that they looked with hope to the future of the relationship between their Churches. They also recognized that the meeting itself was a special expression of how this relationship has grown stronger both on the local level and within the context of the theological dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches as a whole. The joyful encounter took place at the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul—the "*coryphaei* of the Apostles," as liturgical tradition calls them. During their meeting, Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II declared their sincere and firm willingness to remain obedient to the will of Jesus Christ, to intensify their work toward full unity among all Christians, and make every possible effort deemed useful to the life of their communities. They assured each other that they both desired that the Catholic and Orthodox faithful of Cyprus live in full fraternal solidarity based on their common faith in the Risen Christ.

In the aforementioned Common Declaration,³² Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II also recalled the long history of Christianity in Cyprus, which began with the proclamation of the first disciples who came to

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, "Common Declaration," June 16, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070616_chrysostomos-ii.html.

³² Cf. *ibid.*

Cyprus from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of St. Stephen. Then, they spoke of Paul's voyage to Rome (Acts 11:19; 27:4) through Cyprus. Finally, they recognized that they must be faithful to the grace of the vocation bestowed on the Church at the dawn of Christianity and bear witness to the Gospel in modern times.

Benedict XVI continued this thought at another ecumenical meeting at the Church of Ayia Kiriaki Chrysopolitissa.³³ He began his address with a passage from Acts (13:1-4), which states that Cyprus was first place to which the Apostle Paul was sent on his missionary journey: "Set apart by the Holy Spirit, Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, and Mark, the future evangelist, first came to Salamis, where they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues. Traversing the island, they reached Paphos where, close to this very place, they preached in the presence of the Roman pro-consul Sergius Paulus. Thus it was from this place that the Gospel message began to spread throughout the Empire, and the Church grounded in the apostolic teaching, was able to take root throughout the then-known world."³⁴

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Benedict understood that the Church in Cyprus is called the Apostolic Church and could rightly be proud of its direct link to Paul, Barnabas, and Mark, and its communion with the apostolic faith, a communion which linked the Church in Cyprus to all Churches that preserved the same rule of faith. It is this real yet imperfect communion that united the first Christians and impelled them to overcome their divisions, strive for restoration of the full and visible unity that, according to Ephesians 4:4-5, the Lord asks of all of His followers: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

On this occasion, the Pope noted that Cyprus is like a bridge between the East and the West. He declared the Catholic and Orthodox Churches of Cyprus are committed to advancing in the way of dialogue and fraternal cooperation on the path to their true goal of full unity. At the same time, he expressed his hope that the Holy Spirit would enlighten and strengthen their minds and resolve, so that together they could bring the message of salvation to the men and women of their time, who thirst for the truth that brings authentic freedom and salvation (Jn 8:32), meaning Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI also recalled: "Sanctity is the sign of the fullness of Christian life, a profound inner docility to the Holy Spirit who calls us to constant conversion and

³³ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address at the Ecumenical Celebration in Paphos," June 4, 2010, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100604_celebrazione-ecum.html.

³⁴ Ibid.

renewal as we strive to be ever more conformed to Christ our Savior.”³⁵ He noted that “[c]onversion and holiness are also the privileged means by which we open our minds and hearts to the Lord’s will for the unity of his Church.” Finally, he encouraged the faithful to pray to the saints who brought the Good News to Cyprus “to preserve [the inhabitants] in the faith of the apostles and to guide [their] steps along the way of unity, charity and peace.”³⁶

When welcoming Chrysostom II to Rome,³⁷ Benedict XVI shared that Chrysostom II’s presence brought to mind St. Paul’s fervent preaching in Cyprus (Acts 13:4) and his adventurous voyage to Rome, where he preached the same Gospel and “sealed his luminous testimony of faith with martyrdom.” He proceeded to ask: “Does not the memory of the Apostle to the Gentiles perhaps invite us to turn our hearts with humility and hope to Christ, who is our one Teacher? With his divine help we must not tire of seeking together the ways of unity, overcoming those difficulties which in the course of history have given rise to divisions and reciprocal diffidence among Christians. May the Lord grant us that we may soon be able to approach the same altar, to partake together of the one Banquet of the Eucharistic Bread and Wine.” On this occasion, the Pope also mentioned Paul’s companion in the preaching of the Gospel, St. Barnabas from Cyprus,³⁸ as well as St. Epiphanius, who fought against Arians and Pneumatomachians, which he writes about in his treatise *Ancoratus*, where he uses two symbols of the faith to explain belief in the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of God, the Perfect Spirit, the Comforter, the Uncreated Spirit), who proceeds from the Father and the Son, which is an important distinction in the Filioque controversy.

The Pope noted that Epiphanius’ method of teaching is still valid; for, it consists in showing the flock entrusted to him by Christ the truth in which it should believe, the path that it should follow to progress, as well as the obstacles that it should avoid. Similarly, in this day and age it is necessary to preach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ to new generations and present to them the dangers of ideas that are contrary to the evangelical spirit. Benedict XVI also asserted that in this day and age we must “put the People of God on their guard against false prophets and the errors of superficiality of proposals that are not in

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Meeting with Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus in Rome,” June 16, 2007.

³⁸ Cf. Ibid.

conformity with the teaching of the divine Teacher, our one Saviour. At the same time, it is urgently necessary to find a new language in which to proclaim the faith that brings us together, a shared language, a spiritual language that can transmit faithfully the revealed truths and thereby help us to reconstruct, in truth and charity, communion among all members of the one Body of Christ.” As Pope Benedict XVI emphasized, ecumenism is ongoing: “We know that this unity is a gift and fruit of the Holy Spirit; but we also know that it requires at the same time a constant effort, enlivened by a sure will and steadfast hope in the power of the Lord.”³⁹

Areas of Collaboration

Evangelization Through the Common Word

Pope Benedict XVI usually encouraged Churches to collaborate in different areas when engaging in ecumenical dialogue. He believed preaching the Gospel in today’s world is the first way in which people can collaborate. The need to preach is the direct result of Christ’s command: “Go and teach all nations” (Mt 28:19). Benedict XVI believed that, among other things, ecumenical preaching should not involve the Churches proclaiming Christ, one against the other or in competition with each other, but rather the Churches should encourage each other to evangelize and courageously convey the faith in the diaspora.

Although the Catholic Church is ready to do everything possible to establish ecumenical rapprochement that could lead to full communion between Catholics and the Orthodox, for the present, Pope Benedict XVI proposed working together pastorally on all possible levels to preach the Gospel, glorify the name of God and honor the Theotokos-Hodegetria.⁴⁰ That is why Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II indicated in their Common Declaration that they are beseeching the Lord of history in prayer to strengthen the Churches’ witness so that the Gospel proclamation of salvation can reach new generations and be a light for all men and women.⁴¹ With this in mind, they entrusted their desires and resolutions to the Theotokos, the Mother of God Hodegetria, who points the way to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Cf. “Address at the Meeting with Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in Rome,” December 14, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20061214_archbishop-athens.html.

⁴¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, “Common Declaration,” June 16, 2007.

According to Benedict XVI, proclaiming the Gospel in an ecumenical way means giving common witness to the truth of the Gospel to those who experience violence, indifference, or egoism. Through this common testimony, it is possible to help such individuals to find the path that to truth, which, in turn, leads to justice and peace. Bearing this in mind and following John Paul II's example, Benedict XVI invited religious leaders to Assisi to participate in a day of reflection, dialogue, and prayer for peace and justice in the world on October 27, 2011. The theme of the event was: "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace" and was intended to continue the path of dialogue and brotherhood among those who follow different religions.⁴² Benedict emphasized that proclamation of the Gospel is imperative in the face of widespread secularization and other erroneous ideologies. Such preaching is equally urgent and necessary in countries with centuries-old Christian tradition, where the process of secularization had tarnished the continuity of this tradition by contesting or even rejecting this tradition. In this situation, all Christians living in Europe – Catholics, Orthodox, and others – must renew their awareness of Europe's Christian roots, traditions, and values, and to restore their vitality. This is necessary all the more because the Eastern Churches are, in fact, living witnesses of the beginning of Christianity today (OE, 1), and their ancient tradition is an integral part of the heritage of the Church of Christ (UR, 17; OL).

The Joint Defense of Christian Europe

Benedict XVI's speeches and both of the declarations that he signed with Bartholomew I⁴³ and Chrysostom II,⁴⁴ respectively, contain a positive assessment of the expansion of the European Union. When welcoming Archbishop Christodoulos to Vatican in 2006, shortly after the European Union had expanded, the Pope encouraged him to cooperate in building European unity.⁴⁵ He emphasized that European civilization should not be united only economically but also culturally and spiritually and based on common values. Benedict XVI then continues by asking:

⁴² Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople," June 28 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110628_patriarcato-ecumenico.html.

⁴³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, "Common Declaration," June 16, 2007.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address at the Meeting with Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in Rome," December 14, 2006.

What kind of civilization should this be? Should it be one of life and love—one that defends human life from conception to natural death? Or will it be a civilization of death, abortion, contempt for the marriage between a man and a woman and for traditional family, euthanasia, and hatred of religion? Benedict XVI also posed the following questions: What kind of culture would a united Europe have? Would it be a culture that respects Europe's Christian past, which shaped the continent's identity; ethnic minorities; the poor; the sick; and the elderly? Or will it have a culture that protects only sexual minorities, while destroying cultural works and proclaiming relativism and hedonism? What values would a united Europe uphold? Would these values include faith in God the Creator and the Savior of mankind and the value of human dignity, or the values of the French or Bolshevik revolutions that mercilessly took countless lives and the values of Marxist class struggle (i.e., hatred)?

Ecumenism

Even though Europe and the countries of the world strive to unite through globalization today, divisions and conflicts still exist. Meanwhile, ordinary people's need for certainty and peace is growing. Ordinary people remain lost and consumed by a hedonistic and relativistic culture that undermines the very existence of the truth. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that Divine Revelation offers the most accurate testimony of Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and affirmed that the answer to man's deepest longings is found only in Him.⁴⁶ Finally, Benedict XVI expressed his belief that both Catholics and Orthodox are called to contribute to the culture and spiritual character of Europe. He stated that their primary duty is simply to defend the Christian roots that have shaped European culture throughout the centuries. Given Europe's Christian roots, Christian tradition should be manifested today's world in the preservation of the dignity of the human person; respect for minorities; and protection of the most valuable achievements of Europe's rich civilization. According to Benedict, both Catholics and Orthodox should fight for respect for human rights, particularly and primarily individual freedom, especially religious freedom, which ensures respect for all other freedoms.⁴⁷ He emphasized that every member state of the European union should promote and defend these rights.

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Welcoming Address to Bartholomew I who arrived in Rome for the opening of the Pauline Year," June 28, 2008, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080628_vespri.html.

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration," November 30, 2006.

Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I stated in their Common Declaration that followers of Christ need to unite in preserving their roots, traditions, and Christian values in Europe and the world, which would ensure respect for history and, thereby, contribute to the European culture of the future and improve human relations on every level.⁴⁸ Such a common defense would not mean devaluing ethnic minorities and their traditions, culture, and religions, because Europeans have always been open to other religions and appreciated their contribution to world culture. Today, however, the fact that Europe has been predominantly Christian for centuries is simply not mentioned or is denied outright. Moreover,

in both declarations, the authors emphasized that the European Union should recognize respect for human rights (i.e. the rights of every human being created in the image and likeness of God), if it is to develop economically, socially, and culturally. This should be based on solid cultural foundations, refer to common ethical principles, and be open to religious reality. For this reason, “it is essential to revive the Christian roots of Europe which made its civilization great down the centuries and to recognize that in this regard the Western and Eastern Christian traditions have a common task to achieve.”⁴⁹

In one of his earlier speeches, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged⁵⁰ joint opposition to that which threatens the Christian faith in Europe: growing secularization, relativism, nihilism, and hedonism, because each of these attitudes paves the way for behavior and legislation that undermine the inalienable dignity of the human person and call into question fundamental institutions like marriage. He then proceeded to recognize that it is urgently necessary to engage in joint pastoral activities that would be a common witness and a joint testimony of the hope of those who believe.

Benedict XVI cited Germany as an example of a harmonious relationship between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He mentioned that more than 1.5 million Orthodox and Eastern Christians live in Germany and are an integral part of a society that revived the treasure of Christian culture and faith in Europe. While today many people want to “somehow free public life” from God, Churches in Germany give a peaceful witness of what it is to work toward

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, “Common Declaration,” June 16, 2007; Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, “Common Declaration,” November 30, 2006.

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Meeting with Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in Rome,” December 14, 2006.

understanding and building a community of peoples by putting the preaching of the mystery of the Incarnation of God at the center of their activities. “[G]oing to the heart of Holy Scripture, to truly encounter the Word in the words, to penetrate the Word of God opens the eyes up for today’s reality for our world also.”⁵¹The Christian awareness of the dignity of every person is based on the Incarnation of the Word of God, and it impels Christians to work together to defend human life, from conception to natural death. Christians express their unconditional fidelity to and faith in God, the Creator of human life, in their strong opposition to anything that interferes with life, manipulates it, and selects one human life over another. For this reason, Christians are aware of the value of marriage and the family and consider defending the integrity and exclusivity of marriage between a man and a woman an important issue. This common commitment contributes to building a society that has a future because it maintains all due respect for the human person.⁵²In their Common Declaration, Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II⁵³ also expressed their serious concern regarding bioethics today as “certain techniques applied to genetics, intentionally conceived to meet legitimate needs, actually go so far as to undermine the dignity of a human being created at the image of God.” They further stressed that using a human being for unauthorized experiments and genetic testing that does not respect ethical values and can never be excused or permitted at any stage of human life because they are offenses against life, an “attack” on the inviolability and dignity of every human being.

Working Together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East

Both in common declarations and in his addresses, Benedict XVI makes a number of references to the problems facing Christians in the Middle East. Although Christianity was born and had thrived there, Christians who live there today are, unfortunately, a minority. For this reason, in their common declaration, Patriarch Bartholomew I and Benedict XVI expressed the need for peace in the Middle East, which is an important place in the plan of salvation—a place where Christ the Lord lived, suffered, died and resurrected, and where many Christians

⁵¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address in Freiburg,” September 24, 2011.

⁵² Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to Bartholomew I,” October 18, 2008, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20081018_bartolomeo-i.html.

⁵³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, “Common Declaration,” June 16, 2007.

have lived for centuries. They both expressed a keen desire for the different religious communities, churches, and religions in this region to coexist peacefully. They also encouraged Christians to establish closer ties among themselves; engage in genuine and loyal interreligious dialogue; and work together to overcome different forms of violence and discrimination.⁵⁴ Patriarch Bartholomew I and Benedict XVI also asserted that interreligious relationships need to be built in a spirit of truth, respect, and reciprocity, where different traditions and cultures can be open to each other in the name of the One God (Acts 2: 9-11).⁵⁵ On several occasions, when speaking to the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue and representatives of the Middle East who were participating in the Commission, Benedict XVI expressed deep concern for the difficult situation in which individuals and Christian communities in the Middle East find themselves. He particularly regretted that Christian minorities face great difficulties in the ever-changing geopolitical climate of the Middle East, which is why many are willing to emigrate. He appealed to all Christians to accept each other, work together to acknowledge and recognize each other, build mutual trust, and thus serve the cause of lasting peace and a just future⁵⁶ as an expression of faithfulness to God's will. He also reminded them that they were called to have courage, persevere in their places of residence with the help of the Holy Spirit, and look with hope and confidence to the future that the Lord will open up to his children. Benedict XVI hoped that the intercession and examples of countless martyrs and saints who lived in those lands and belonged to different Churches would serve as a courageous witness to Christ and sustain and strengthen the Christian communities in their faith.⁵⁷ In every speech, the Pope assured Christians in the Middle East that he was praying that they might enjoy the Spirit's abundant gifts of wisdom, joy and peace.⁵⁸ In ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration," November 30, 2006.

⁵⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches," June 9, 2007.

⁵⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Joint International Commission," January 28, 2011.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, "Address to the Joint Commission," February 1, 2007; Benedict XVI, "Messaggio," December 21, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061221_medio-orient.html.

⁵⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Joint Commission," January 25, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_sp_20130125_comm-theological-dialogue.html.

Churches, Benedict XVI also shared his belief that working together for charitable aims is important. Specifically, in Warsaw, Pope Benedict XVI showed appreciation for the Christmas Eve Cause to Aid Children. He emphasized that ecumenical dialogue created an entire network of relationships in which persons of various denominations could join to work for ““respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenseless”” (DeCa 30b). This was very important because Christians expect from their brothers in faith a mutual gift of love, trust, testimony, and specific spiritual and material aid from Christians.⁵⁹ Benedict XVI also noted that the call for solidarity and mutual charitable aid extends beyond the community of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. For this reason, in their Common Declaration, both Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II appealed to economically and technologically developed nations to show solidarity with their brothers and sisters who live in countries that suffer from poverty, hunger, and disease.⁶⁰ Both of them also requested governing bodies to try to create conditions conducive to the fair distribution of land resources in a spirit of solidarity with the poor and all those in need throughout the world.

Ecumenism

One Voice on Global Issues

In their Common Declaration, Pope Benedict XVI and Archbishop Chrysostom II addressed those who “raise their hand against their own brethren, exhorting them firmly to lay down their weapons and to take steps to heal the injuries caused by war.” They also appealed to those in governments to protect human rights in every country and reiterated that respect for human beings created in God’s image is the basic duty of all. Religious freedom is preeminent among the human rights, and disrespecting this freedom seriously offends human dignity because it harms man’s heart, in which God resides. “Consequently, to profane, sack or destroy places of worship is an act against humanity and the civilization of the peoples.”⁶¹

Both declarations that Benedict XVI signed with Bartholomew I and Chrysostom II, respectively, also mentioned protection of the

⁵⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address at the Ecumenical Encounter in the Holy Trinity Church in Warsaw,” May 25, 2006.

⁶⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, “Common Declaration,” June 16, 2007.

⁶¹ Ibid.

environment.⁶² The current situation threatens to destroy created reality, which God passed on to man so that he would be able to realize God's plan. Meanwhile, human beings manage the environment in which they live in such a way that it threatens their own existence. The reason for this is that men puts themselves at the center of the universe, forget the Creator's command, and enclose themselves within the egoistic pursuit of their own well-being. Thus, people forget that everyone should respect and protect the environment.

Summary

In his addresses, Benedict XVI's always showed deep respect for his guests at the Vatican or for those who he visited. He almost always began his addresses and greeted these individuals with words from the New Testament. In this way, he referred to what the followers of Christ shared in common and on which they based their faith. Benedict XVI always and invariably pointed to the One Source from which the Christian faith flowed: Jesus Christ, the One Lord, and the mystery of His passion, death, and resurrection. Then, he emphasized the unity of the Apostles who were united under their one head, St. Peter; the unity of the faith that they professed and for which they labored and gave their lives; and the one Church founded by the Son of God incarnate, who prayed for the unity. Finally, the Holy Father referred to the one confession of faith that all Christians professed during the first centuries of Christianity.

In ecumenical dialogue, Benedict XVI focused clearly on the search for truth, which implied the need to explain and come to an agreement on theological differences, especially the issue of the primacy of Peter. He emphasized that, despite the progress that has been made, the Churches had still not entered into full communion. He pointed out that the followers of particular Churches will be able to participate in one Eucharist together only when full communion is achieved. He believed that it is necessary to promote spiritual ecumenism, meaning communal prayers and fraternal meetings, in order to achieve this goal. In this way, dialogue must continue in charity and truth as well as in truth and charity. For, without prayer and theological dialogue, one cannot count on progress on the path towards full unity. It is necessary to ask for the gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit Who opens the human heart and mind to the truth. Unity is always a gift from God

⁶² Cf. Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration," November 30, 2006; Benedict XVI, Chrysostomos II, "Common Declaration," June 16, 2007.

and will occur only when God wills it. This does not necessarily mean that those who believe should not make effort to achieve unity; rather, it means that they should be even more committed to achieving unity because someday every person will be accountable before God for what he or she has done to prepare the hearts of Christians to unite. In this sense, unity depends to a certain degree on the collaboration of Christ's disciples.

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