



CHRISTIAN Unity



CATHOLIC - ORTHODOX

Common Declaration

on

The Sanctity of Life

His Excellency, The Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory,
Roman Catholic Archbishop of Atlanta

&

His Eminence, Metropolitan Alexios,
Greek Orthodox Archbishop of the Metropolis of Atlanta

Sunday, April 3, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.

LAETARE SUNDAY AND SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

In 1964, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I met for the first time as pilgrims on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. This was the beginning of a new tradition of fraternal visits to foster a true dialogue of charity and truth. A theological dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the U.S.A. began in 1965 and at the international level in 1980. In the meantime, there have been many ecumenical gatherings between the Vatican and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Year of St. Paul, which began on June 29, 2008 and continued until First Vespers on June 28, 2009, was a time of great grace for both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Throughout the year, in the footsteps of their venerable predecessors, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI and His All-Holiness, Bartholomew I, Patriarch of Constantinople, joined together in prayer and discussion on many occasions. These fraternal meetings have been an inspiration to Catholic and Orthodox faithful throughout the world. Here in the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta, our sister Churches came together for the first Catholic-Orthodox Ecumenical Gathering at the Cathedral of Christ the King on May 6, 2009. Since then, we have come together on many occasions to pray together for the unity for which the Lord Jesus prayed before His death on the Cross. These gatherings have been sources of inspiration and encouragement for our people.

On the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, 2004, Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I signed a Common Declaration at the Vatican. They committed their Churches "to nourish an awareness of the sacred nature of human life; to work to ensure that science does not deny the divine spark that every human being receives with the gift of life" (Common Declaration (2004) 10). Another Common Declaration was signed by Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on the Feast of St. Andrew, 2006, at the Phanar in Constantinople. They wrote:

"We cannot ignore the increase of secularization, relativism, even nihilism, especially in the Western world. All this calls for a renewed and powerful proclamation of the Gospel, adapted to the cultures of our time. Our traditions represent for us a patrimony which must be continually shared, proposed, and interpreted anew. This is why we must strengthen our cooperation and our common witness before the world"

(Common Declaration (2006) 3).



They continued:

“We are called to work together to promote respect for the rights of every human being, created in the image and likeness of God...We must all commit ourselves to the renewed service of humanity and the defense of human life, every human life”

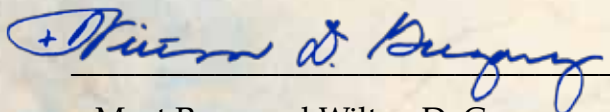
(Common Declaration (2006) 5).

In observance of the Feast of St. Andrew on November 30, 2010, a Delegation from the Vatican led by His Eminence, Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity visited His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. The Holy Father and His All-Holiness exchanged customary greetings. His All-Holiness emphasized that “faithful to the authentic and authoritative message of the Apostles, we are called to transmit this message to the contemporary world with one voice and one heart, aware of the concerns and embracing the problems of the world.” Pope Benedict, for his part, stressed the importance of working “more closely in sharing the Gospel and in presenting Christ as the answer to the deepest questions and spiritual aspirations of the men and women of our day.”

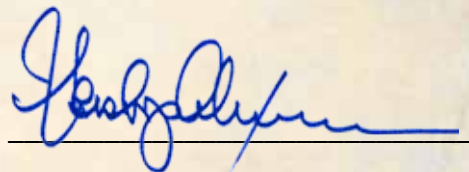
Inspired and encouraged by the common witness of our venerable hierarchs, we, Alexios of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta and Wilton of the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, commit ourselves anew to prayer, dialogue and mutual collaboration especially in areas of common concern. Given that the right to life is the foundation and most fundamental of all human rights, we voice our concern over the many attacks that continue to take place against human life from the moment of conception to natural death.



In the Sacred Scriptures, we are reminded that every person is made in the image and likeness of God: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). And so the human person is the apex of God's creation endowed with the gift of human freedom. In the words of St. Irenaeus: "In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have someone upon whom to confer His benefits" (Against Heresies, Book 4, Chapter 9). Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition emphasize the sacred dignity of the human person and God's purpose in creating, to confer his blessings upon him. In today's society, we have witnessed many attacks on human life, especially in its most vulnerable stages. As our heavenly patrons, Ss. Peter and Andrew were one as brothers and Apostles of the Lord, we too are united as brothers, as we affirm the sacred dignity and value of every human life. We urge all those in public office to stand firm in their commitment to life. We exhort our people to pray and sacrifice for life. We cannot be indifferent to the cries of those whose voices have been silenced. Life is God's to give and it is only He who can take it away. We entrust our efforts to the intercession of the Most Blessed Theotokos, the Mother of God. In the Magnificat, her song of praise, she marveled at the great things that God has done in the lives of His people. May she intercede for us with the Creator and Author of Life so that a culture of death will be replaced by a civilization of life and love in which human life is accepted and protected as God's greatest and most precious gift.



Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory
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Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta



His Eminence Alexis
Metropolitan of Atlanta
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta



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