

Pope and Patriarch in Historic Meeting

By JAMES C. O'NEILL
VATICAN CITY (NC) —
Pope Paul VI and Orthodox
Ecumenical Patriarch
Athenagoras I of Constantinople (Istanbul) embraced

and exchanged kisses of peace on the front steps of St. Peter's and on the high altar of the basilica while thousands clapped and cheered.

The latest demonstration of goodwill and desire for the reunion of Christendom took place October 26 on the first day of a three-day visit of the Patriarch to the Vatican. The Patriarch's party, including four Orthodox metropolitans and his personal physician, arrived at Fiumicino Airport from Zurich, Switzerland, at 9:30 A.M.

After a brief rest at the Tower of St. John in the Vatican gardens, which was the Patriarch's residence during his visit, the tall 81-year-old Orthodox leader was given to St. Peter's Square. Flanked by Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, dean of the college of cardinals, and assisted by a train bearer and his party, the Patriarch walked up the red-carpeted stairs to the front porch of the basilica, where he was first greeted by Paolo Cardinal Marella, archpriest of the basilica, and his canons.

FIRST SINCE 1451

It was the first time since the 15th century that a patriarch of Constantinople had visited Rome (Patriarch Gregory came in exile in 1451). His welcome was elaborate and enthusiastic, and the warm October sun favored a sizeable turnout of Romans and visitors.

The Pope left the covered front porch to greet his distinguished visitor, whom he had not seen since they had been together in Istanbul in July. Smiling broadly, the Pope embraced the impressive bearded Patriarch and repeatedly they exchanged the kiss of peace. Together they walked the full

length of the aisle of the great church and blessed the cheering, clapping crowds as they walked. They knelt briefly at the altar of the Blessed Sacrament and then walked on to the Altar of Our Lady, where they stood for a brief silent prayer.

As they walked into the church, the Sistine Choir intoned in Latin the words of the Gospel, "A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another as I have loved you, says the Lord."

Together they stopped before the Altar of the Confession, which marks the loca-

tion of the grave of St. Peter. Patriarch Athenagoras blessed and lit a votive lamp which was a gift to the basilica by the Orthodox leader. Then they mounted to the high altar above the Confession and sat in identical armchairs for the prayer ceremonies of the day.

The prayer service, including speeches by the Pope and Patriarch, lasted for an hour and 15 minutes, and was much longer than any Pope has taken part in with other non-Catholic religious leaders. The service was very carefully composed by the

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UNITY SERVICE OF PRAYER with Pope Paul VI, left, and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople presiding, at the papal altar, was held in St. Peter's basilica. (NC Photo)

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 Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and others. It was described as a concelebration of prayer. Selections from the New Testament were read in Italian by a Vatican prelate

and in Greek by an Orthodox deacon accompanying the Patriarch. Various chants separated the two readings, which were followed by a specially composed prayer of the faithful. These prayers were read in

Italian, Greek, English, French, Spanish and German and were answered by the thousands in the church with the response, Kyrie Eleison (Greek for "Lord have mercy"). This in turn was followed by a prayer of praise

and thanksgiving, the singing of the Sanctus and recitation by the Pope of a long prayer which in part asked that "by recognizing the errors of the past, may we merit to arrive at the hour of perfect communion which we all desire."

VIBRANT VOICE

Following the prayer, the Pope, the Patriarch and all present stood to recite the Our Father. The Patriarch was the first to deliver his speech in Greek. His strong vibrant voice contrasted somewhat with that of the Pope which sounded a bit weak because of his illness. After Patriarch Athenagoras finished speaking, his speech was summarized in Italian and the summary reading was broken frequently by very enthusiastic applause.

The Patriarch said that he had come to the Pope "as a brother toward a brother." He called the See of Rome "the fount for honor and order in the organism of the Christian Churches."

He said that the ecumenical movement, various interconfessional meetings of intramural and interconfessional meetings of the Church and his own meetings with the Pope had "laid bare the heavy wrong of the division of the Church." But he continued:

"On the other hand, the fact that we have all emerged from our isolation and our self-sufficiency to search for the solid ground on which the undivided Church was founded, has revealed to us the truth that what unites us is much more than what divides us."

He returned to an idea he has repeated several times in the past, that a dialogue of charity must precede theological dialogue.

COMMON EUCHARIST

"We stand in this holy place next to Your Holiness, near the altar, and we prepare our heart and spirit to march toward a common Eucharist,

in the sentiments of the Lord washing the Apostles' feet. In this extraordinarily holy moment, we hear the cry of the blood of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the voice of the Church of the catacombs and of the martyrs of the Colosseum inviting us to exhaust every means to achieve the holy work undertaken, that of a perfect conjoining of Christ's divided Church. This is not only that the Lord's will may be fulfilled but so that the world may see the splendor of what is, according to our formula of faith, the Church's first property: unity."

The Pope next spoke in Latin and in turn his speech was summarized and applause again broke out frequently. The Pope told the Patriarch that:

"On both sides, we are impelled by the single desire of purifying our souls in obedience to the truth, to love one another sincerely as brothers, loving one another earnestly from the heart. This rightness of our intentions and the sincerity of our decision are surely a sign of the Holy Spirit's action. His powerful action of profound renewal that we are experiencing and marvelling at in the Church and in every member of the Christian faithful."

SPIRIT'S ACTION

The Pope cited instances of renewal within the Catholic Church, such as the Second Vatican Council and the Synod of Bishops and within Orthodoxy, such as the Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes. He added: "Is that not a further sign of the Spirit's action, urging our churches to active preparation so as to make possible the re-establishment of their full communion with one another?"

"We should on both sides take courage and follow up this effort developing it as much as we possible can by contacts and by a cooperation whose focus we should work



POPE PAUL made a gift of this 16th century crucifix to his guest, the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople, following a 90-minute conference in the Pope's study on the second day of the Patriarch's visit with the Holy Father. (NC Photo)

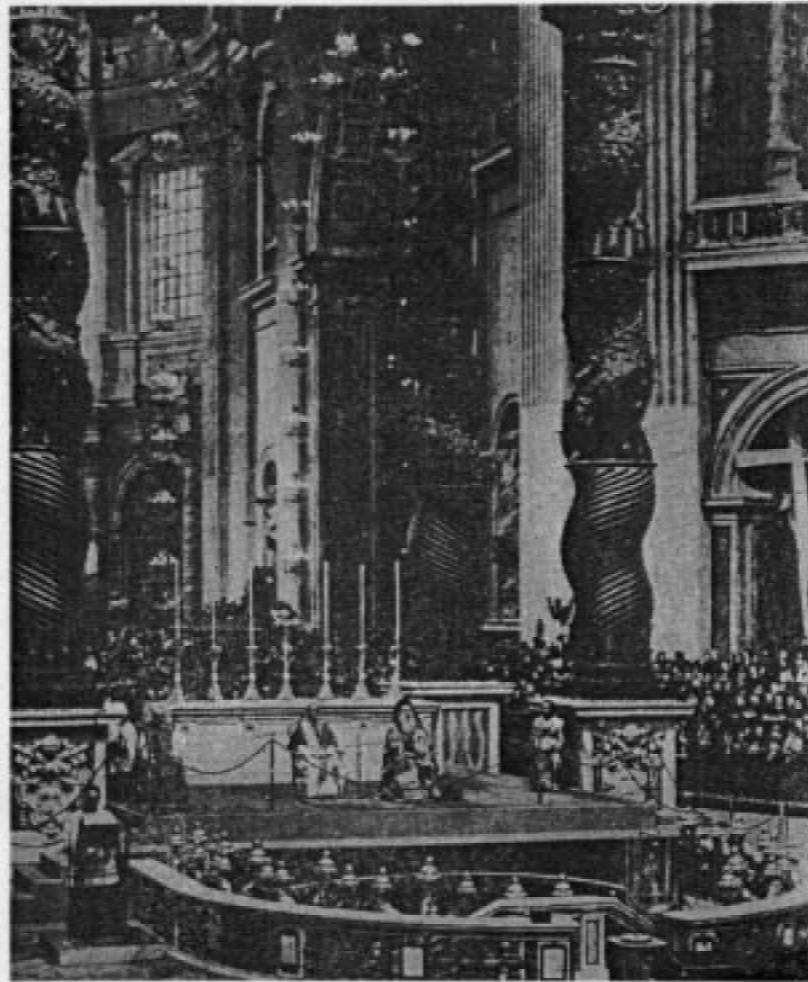
out together. Far more than by a discussion of the past, it is in a positive collaboration toward giving a response to what the Spirit asks of the church today that we shall eventually surmount the obstacles still separating us."

After the summary of the Pope's speech was read, the Pope and the Patriarch stood and embraced one another exchanging the kiss of peace. The Pope then exchanged the kiss of peace with the metropolitans in the Patriarch's party, while the Patriarch did the same with Cardinals Tisserant and Marella, as well as Amleto Car-

inal Ciognani, Papal Secretary of State, and Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J., president of the unity secretariat. When it came Cardinal Bea's turn, there was almost frenzied applause in tribute to his ecumenical activities. The cardinals exchanged kisses of peace with the other members of the Patriarch's party while the metropolitans exchanged kisses with the college of cardinals and members of the synod present.

A brief prayer in Greek by the Patriarch and the blessing of the Pope and the Patriarch brought the ceremony to a close and the two walked

down the long aisle of St. Peter's again blessing the clapping and cheering thousands lining both sides. The Pope returned to his apartment to rest and Patriarch Athenagoras was driven to St. John Tower. Later that afternoon, he was driven to St. Paul's outside the Walls for the private pilgrimage and was accompanied by Cardinal Tisserant. That evening, he was a guest of honor at a reception in the Vatican Palace's Hall of Vestments, where he was greeted by the cardinals, the synod members and the secretaries of the Roman congregations.



POPE, PATRIARCH OCCUPY THRONES — Pope Paul and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I occupy thrones before the main Altar of the Confession in St. Peter's Basilica during service for Christian unity. (RNS Photo)