

Witness of Vasileios Brentas, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Reverend priests, respected professors, ladies and gentlemen.

True love in Christ and concern for the other is the driving force for the evolution of the human mind to build within it a spiritual, loving experience. I heard this message from my childhood first through the texts of the Orthodox faith, which promote unity among all people and love for one another. Since I was a child, I went to church and tried to understand the meaning of the Divine Liturgy. Characteristic for me in the liturgy is the prayer for the unity of all. The study of the Holy Scriptures was combined with the devotional life, as in its texts I observed a timeless, hyper-logical message beyond the weaknesses and passions of the mortal created world message, a message of the union of all people in Christ. Engraved in my soul is the exhortation in John's Gospel 17:20-26 to unite all to Christ as one in a perfect unity. A unity not based on some short-lived philosophical thought, but on eternal love and faith in the same God. I immediately realized that this is not an ideological transient phenomenon but a spiritual eternal good and it instantly marked me, propelling me into life in Christ to be closer to the subject of the ecumenical movement.

This interest of mine gradually evolved when I was now studying at the faculty of theology in Greece, and I came into greater contact with the ecumenical movement as we had it as a special course in the university. Thus, I began to understand the real teaching of the Orthodox faith, which essentially seeks and desires this spiritual relationship with the other churches. However, a key factor that fascinated me in this direction was my intense involvement with the science of history. Seeing through the study of history books the great misunderstandings that took place between Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants and the great efforts made in the past to restore and strengthen relations in a context of solidarity and love in Christ, have strengthened my conviction that we must overcome the obstacles of the past in order to be able to work together in dealing with future events and present problems. Observing, moreover, the earlier efforts of Patriarch Athenagoras for the unity of the churches and the equally courageous efforts of our present Patriarch Bartholomew, despite the great problems that stand in the way, it has given me courage to believe that we, the new generation representing the future of the ecumenical movement, are ready to take up this historical legacy left by the earlier architects of the ecumenical movement.

All this was the main reason for accepting the offer to study at the Orthodox Institute of Chambésy as I am keen to come into contact with people from other churches. This great challenge abroad further broadened my horizons spiritually and intellectually in the essential approach of the ecumenical movement as it offered me the opportunity to see directly the great respect and the great love that believers of other traditions show for the Orthodox Church. Even now I am still deeply moved by the respect, the mutual understanding and solidarity of the Catholics in their relations with us the Orthodox and their piety when they entered an Orthodox Christian church, giving a lesson of cultural respect because of the reverence they showed during the Orthodox service. I still do not forget the great love and help offered to me by Protestant friends, teachers and acquaintances in Geneva when they came into fellowship with us the Orthodox. I feel truly honoured and delighted to have this opportunity to offer, my generation and myself, a small share in the edifice of unity and spiritual solidarity, the ecumenical movement that needs the support of young people more than anything else as they take up the ring of succession for the course of humanity and its values.