



The Holy See

*MESSAGE OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 13th INTER-CHRISTIAN SYMPOSIUM
[MILAN, 28-30 AUGUST 2013]*

To my Venerable Brother

Cardinal Kurt Koch

President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

It was with great joy that I learned of this inter-Christian Symposium, organized every two years by the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality at the Pontifical University Antonianum and by the Department of Theology at the Orthodox Faculty of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Its aim is to deepen understanding of the theological and spiritual Traditions of East and West and to cultivate brotherly relations of friendship and scholarship among members of the two academic institutions.

I would, therefore, like to extend my cordial greeting to the organizers, the speakers and to all the participants in the 13th year of this praiseworthy initiative, which is taking place this year in Milan, with the collaboration of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, on the theme: "The life of Christians and civil power — historical questions and current perspectives in East and West". This subject fits well into the framework of the many initiatives organized to commemorate the 17th centenary of the promulgation of the Edict of Constantine. Among the especially important events in Milan, there was the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I to the Church of St Ambrose and to the city.

The historical decision, with which religious freedom for Christians was decreed, opened up new ways for spreading the Gospel and contributed greatly to the birth of European civilization. The commemoration of that event offers the Symposium an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of the ways in which the Christian world relates to civil society and with the authority that presides

over it. These ways have developed in the course of history in very different contexts, with significant diversification in East and West. At the same time, they have retained several fundamental common traits, such as the conviction that civil power finds its limits before the law of God, reserving just space for the autonomy of conscience, with the awareness that ecclesiastical authority and civil power are called to cooperate for the integral good of the human community.

With the hope that the work of this Symposium bear abundant fruit for the progress of historical research and mutual understanding between the different Traditions, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to those who have contributed to the organization of the Conference and to all those who are taking part in it.

From the Vatican, 19 August 2013

FRANCIS