



Bishop Venancio, the former Bishop of Fatima, speaking to Patriarch Athenagoras. John Haffert, International Lay Delegate of the Blue Army, on the right.

"We Are One!"

by JOHN M. HAFFERT

Pope Paul VI went to Fatima in 1967. A statue of Our Lady (a "pilgrim Virgin") was blessed by the Holy Father and then taken in 1971 to Istanbul and presented to His Holiness, Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and head of the Orthodox Church of Russia and of all the world.

Eight years later, Pope John Paul II went to Istanbul... at a time of high feeling in the Moslem world... to begin what seems certain to be the final healing of the great schism.

Blue Army's Role?

It seems appropriate to recall at this amazing moment in history *the role of Our Lady of Fatima* (who promised the conversion of Russia) *and of the Blue Army* beginning with the encounter with Patriarch Athenagoras.

As I had the privilege of accompanying the Bishop of Fatima on that

historic journey, three things above all stand out in my memory:

We Were Stunned

First, those startling words of the Orthodox Patriarch: "I was with the Pope at Fatima."

The Bishop of Fatima and I sat in somewhat stunned silence. We knew that the venerable Patriarch had not been to Fatima... and yet he declared this *with such positiveness* that we wondered what he could possibly mean. And then Athenagoras said:

The second most vivid memory was the joy of the Patriarch on receiving the statue of Our Lady. He kissed it, and exclaimed with great emotion: "What a blessing you bring!" and then, as he kissed the statue again: "My Mother! What a joy to receive you!"

Now, in meeting with Pope John Paul II, and following the spirit of Athenagoras, the present Patriarch (Dimitrios I) moves to heal the great schism... *to end a thousand years of Christian division.*

A Most Touching Incident

But there was a third... and very touching incident... which I will also always remember. A picture of it appears on the news page of this issue of SOUL:

As we were leaving, Bishop Venancio bent over to kiss the ring of the Patriarch. Immediately the holy man *bent to kiss the Bishop's head.*

As the Bishop of Fatima straightened, the Patriarch embraced him and said... with the Pilgrim Virgin standing near: "WE ARE ONE!"

Following this visit, with a Blue Army pilgrimage, we sailed in a chartered ship to Odessa, in Russia.

Is this where Pope John Paul II may go next?