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Keynote Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the World Policy Conference 2024 (Abu Dhabi, December 13th, 2024)



Your Highnesses,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Leaders and Participants,

Dear Friends,

It is with profound gratitude that we address this esteemed gathering of the World Policy Conference 2024 here in Abu Dhabi, a city that exemplifies how vision and wisdom can transform challenges into opportunities. Our presence in this

remarkable setting, where tradition harmoniously coexists with innovation, offers an apt backdrop for our deliberations on global governance and international cooperation.

We bring greetings from the Church of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, an institution that has witnessed and participated in seventeen consecutive centuries of human history, adapting to changing circumstances while maintaining unaltered its fundamental principles and values. One of these core principles of the Orthodox Church is its conciliar nature. For this reason, it is also known as “the Church of the Councils” par excellence. This conciliar tradition offers valuable insights for our contemporary global challenges.

The upcoming year, 2025, holds particular significance as we commemorate the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. In 325, Emperor Constantine the Great demonstrated remarkable foresight by gathering Christian bishops from all over the known at that time oikoumene, to primarily address pressing theological matters, but also closely linked to them questions of social cohesion and imperial unity. The issuance of the Edict of religious tolerance, also known as the “Edict of Milan,” in 313, a turning point not only in the history of Christianity, but also of religion in general, as well as Constantine’s victory over Licinius in 324 marked a profound religious milestone, “a new triumph of the standard of the cross over the sacrifices of the gods.”

Later acts of Constantine, along with the convocation of the Council of Nicaea, such as his general exhortation to embrace Christianity, while preserving free conviction, and building a framework for theological debate, set the stage for a new relationship between the spiritual and the temporal power. His vision went beyond mere political calculation; he saw that true social cohesiveness needed institutional framework as well as spiritual basis. Like modern global difficulties, Constantine’s problems needed careful balance between unity and variety, authority and freedom, history and progress. The way the Emperor approached social peace and religious pluralism provides an insightful perspective for our present quest for world understanding and collaboration.

Historical Wisdom and Contemporary Challenges: The 2025 Easter Celebration: A Symbol of Hope & A Path to Unity

The difficulties Constantine and the Fathers of Nicaea encountered – the preservation of unity among variety, tackling socioeconomic injustices, and advancing peace – surprisingly resemble the challenges of our time as we assemble in this historic venue. The Church at Nicaea manifested sensitivity

towards those who have severed themselves from communion with her and showed concern for those who do not understand her voice. This awareness helps us today to tackle modern problems.

When, for example, Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and other Protestant Christian communities will celebrate Easter on the same date in 2025, we will see an amazing convergence. As we have repeatedly highlighted lately, more than a calendrical coincidence, this alignment offers a great opportunity for togetherness, especially since the way of celebrating the date of Easter was one of the issues that the Council of Nicaea resolved.

A real step towards repairing old conflicts is the call from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and our Modesty to the Roman-Catholic Church and our elder brother His Holiness Pope Francis of Rome to go back to the Julian calendar for common Easter computation. Based on our knowledge of the Church as Christ's body, this realistic proposal presents a clear road towards unity. Joint celebration can foster better mutual understanding and more significant dialogues amongst the Christian traditions. This timing reveals that, in our basic celebrations, we keep common ground despite long-standing divisions.

Celebrating Christ's Resurrection together helps us to acknowledge our common past and forward towards future unity. This joint celebration will assist us to overcome other differences by demonstrating that our shared faith allows us go beyond past divisions and cooperate for God's glory.

Recommendations for Global Leadership

Inspired by Nicaea's wisdom and contemporary experience, we propose a few doable actions we may take to honour our spiritual legacy while addressing issues of the current society. The wisdom of Nicaea teaches us that global challenges require global responses grounded in shared values and mutual respect. These recommendations come from thorough study of historical precedent and contemporary need, therefore integrating ancient knowledge with present necessity.

With links to climate change and global warming, the ecological crisis forces the Church to fully use its spiritual authority to guard God's creation from the results of human greed, since the roots of this crisis are spiritual and ethical, lying inside each man. Our answer then must be similarly thorough, combining more spiritual rejuvenation with pragmatic steps like the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for setting September 1st as a day of environmental preservation. In this spirit,

first, we support the establishment of a permanent ecumenical environmental council directly under UN advisory authority to organise reactions of religious communities against climate change. Acting as a link between spiritual traditions and world government, this group would provide moral direction on environmental policies and support interfaith cooperation on climate action. The council would try to ensure that environmental policies reflect not only scientific understanding but also spiritual insight on mankind's obligation as carer of creation. The long-standing experience of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in promoting communication between religions and civilisations shows how spiritual insight could guide pragmatic government.

At the same time, the fast development of biotechnology and artificial intelligence calls for ethical systems anchored in ageless wisdom. For this reason, second, we support the development of artificial intelligence by means of a global ethical framework comprising religious and cultural points of view from different traditions. The Orthodox Church welcomes its responsibility to spread all truth contained in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, which naturally includes offering ethical direction for technological advancement. Based on millennia of spiritual knowledge about human nature and purpose, this paradigm would help to ensure that technological advancement serves rather than compromises human dignity. It would provide guidelines for the evolution of artificial intelligence that respect human uniqueness and optimise technological opportunities for the general good.

Third, we stress the importance of inclusive economic policies that, as the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (June, 2016) reaffirmed, admit that "a sustainable economy is that which combines efficiency with justice and social solidarity." This concept asks us to welcome economic systems that balance social cohesiveness with production and human dignity, therefore transcending the exclusive market-driven solutions. By means of sustainable development, such actions will ensure that economic growth benefits the complete human family rather than merely a privileged few and helps to solve wealth imbalance.

The road ahead calls for answers that balance social justice with economic efficiency, scientific development with human dignity, and world collaboration with cultural variety. These ideas taken together offer a whole plan covering global issues that respect our spiritual legacy and our responsibilities to next generations.

The Path Forward

The Orthodox Church holds a special place in addressing global problems since, although it does not participate in political campaigning, its testimony with regard

to human dignity and spiritual freedom naturally bears political relevance. This subtle method allows the Church to remain committed to its spiritual goal while significantly add to public debate. Our interaction with contemporary concerns stems from our basic dedication to human flourishing and spiritual well-being rather than from political ambition. Maintaining this cautious balance helps us approaching urgent worldwide problems without becoming caught in limited political objectives. Focussing instead on universal values that advance human dignity and societal harmony, our responsibility mainly consists in providing moral direction and spiritual insight transcending political divisions. This strategy permits us to keep our spiritual integrity while nevertheless does not hinder us from participating in important conversations like economic fairness, technological developments, and climate crisis. By use of this lens, we can promote a more holistic approach to universal problems that respects divine wisdom as well as human dignity.

Conclusion

In confronting today's challenges, we must remember the enduring lesson from the Council of Nicaea: true success arises from the harmonious integration of spiritual wisdom and practical governance. The impending common observance of Easter in 2025 serves not only as a calendar alignment, but also as a significant symbol of the potential unification among Christian traditions. This unique convergence presents an opportunity to transform symbolic unity into tangible partnership. Drawing inspiration from the example set by Nicaea, we can collaborate to ensure that this event catalyses substantial action for the benefit of society. Like our ancestors seventeen centuries ago, the path ahead necessitates the integration of our spiritual heritage with practical solutions. Let us seize this opportune moment to establish collaborative connections between religious wisdom and contemporary knowledge that will benefit future generations.

Thank you for your kind attention!







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