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Patriarch JOHN X’s Address at the Conference on Developing the Understanding of Peaceful Coexistence



Patriarch JOHN X’s Address
at the Conference on Developing the Understanding of Peaceful Coexistence,
Al-Maghtas – Jordan, December 9, 2025
Your Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein,
may God protect him,
King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,

Your Excellency, the Honorable Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania,

Beloved friends,

It gives me great joy, in this season of the Child of Bethlehem and from the sacred site of His Baptism, to reflect with you on the event of the Nativity—a birth we shall celebrate in just a few days here in noble Jordan—expressed in the words of the angels: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and goodwill toward men.” The peace of the earth and the goodwill of its peoples in their peaceful coexistence are a glory to the Most High, the Holy Lord, who willed that we, upon this earth, be brothers and sisters despite the diversity of our religions and

affiliations. The peace of the earth and the joy of humankind in their fraternity are a glory to the Most High, who desired to dwell among us and made His birth a window, an opening through which He looked from the eternity of His being into the temporality of our world. From here I begin: with the words of the Gospel, with the glad tidings through which the Evangelists introduced the life of Christ.

The peace of the earth is the joy of humankind, and it is the glory of the One who dwells in heaven. This is what we repeat constantly during this season. Christ is the God of peace and the Father of mercies. From the symbolism of God's encounter with His creation, an encounter manifested in the Nativity, I wish to recall a story from the ascetic ascetical literature of the Church Fathers. An elder once came upon a skull. He tapped it with his staff and asked, "Who are you?" It replied, "I am a human being dwelling in hell." He asked again, "And how are you there?" It answered, "We are without consolation, and each of us is bound to the back of another, unable to see his face." A short yet deeply expressive story. Hell is the inability to see the face of the other, or rather, hell is not seeing the face of your brother from another religion or community.

Perhaps this summarizes our shared experience of life in this East, and in the world. Our earthly paradise is to see in the face of our neighbor and our friend something of the merciful countenance of the Creator of heaven and earth. However, our earthly hell, if the expression may be allowed, is to fail to see that face and fail to encounter it, thus failing to behold the gracious face of the Holy One.

We in the Church of Antioch have every right, and I say it humbly, to take pride in being a Church of encounter and meeting. We have the right to take pride in being the first Christian presence in the Arab world and in the Arab civilization. Also, we have the right, modestly, to take pride in being the first bridge between the West and the world of Islam. In the Antiochian Orthodox Church, we use the Arabic language in our prayers and teach theology in Arabic, despite our knowledge of other languages. All this is to say that we are a Church of authenticity and deep roots, and at the same time a Church of openness and encounter. It was in these Antiochian lands that the disciples of the Lord were first called Christians. And it was in these same lands that the Patriarchs of Antioch came to be known as the Patriarchs of the Arabs. Their bread did not distinguish between Christian and Muslim during the First World War. This is but a drop from the vast ocean of the history of this Church which, despite the harshness of history, sees in the other a treasure and has lived the values of shared life since the dawn of its proclamation of the Gospel.

My heartfelt thanks to Jordan and to Albania, who desired that this conference be a living witness on this holy land, and during this blessed Nativity season in which our hearts long for the glory of the One Who dwells in heaven, manifested in the joy of humankind and in the peace that reigns in their hearts and in their homes alike.

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