02/11/2021

Remarks of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the AJC Human Dignity Award



Dear Harriet Schleifer,
Dear Rabbi Noam Marans,
Dear Bobi Baruch,
Dear friends of the American Jewish Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and an honor to receive, from the hands of such esteemed friends, this Human Dignity Award of the American Jewish Committee. Allow us to express our deepest gratitude for this expression of love and care, not only towards our humble person, but also towards what the Ecumenical Patriarchate stands for: dialogue, reconciliation and the fight against religious extremism, hatred and antisemitism.

Reflecting on the title of today's award, "Human Dignity," we are reminded of our common biblical understanding of what it means to be created in God's image and likeness. Our dignity as human being depends on the sacredness of God's image in us.

The book of Genesis reminds us of these words of creation: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." (Genesis 1:26) As you know so well, both of our religious traditions have explored in depth the meaning of this expression. Commenting upon this passage, the Great Midrash – also known as the Midrash Ha-Gadol – offers a beautiful interpretation, that God consulted His own heart, namely, consulted Himself while creating humankind. Thus, the imago Dei becomes the seal of God's love for the entire world. The patristic tradition certainly built upon this hermeneutic: our dignity as human beings is based on this divine imprint in each person as the most precious gift.

Therefore, if this human dignity comes from our understanding of God's image within each of us, how much more should we embrace and care for our fellow human being? We should be deeply inspired by a sense of the sacred that encompasses the entire creation. The seamless garment of God's creation places the human person at the nexus of the Creator's union with His creation. Divine and human meet in every being of this created world.

The key to guaranteeing human dignity as the bedrock to human existence is freedom. It is our prayer to the almighty God that all human beings may enjoy the fullest measure of freedom, as Saint Paul reminds us, and use this freedom to "serve one another through love" (Galatians 5:13).

We are convinced that these are principles that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters in general and with the American Jewish Committee in particular. We would like to commend AJC President Harriet Schleifer, Mr. David Harris, Rabbi Noam Marans and Rabbi David Rosen for advancing interfaith cooperation and understanding, especially among the Jewish and Christian Orthodox traditions.

Dear friends,

In closing, let us reflect on the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Darkness cannot drive away the darkness. Only the light can do that. Hate cannot extinguish hate. Only love can do that."

To fight antisemitism, hatred, and discrimination of all kinds, we all need to be involved. The role of education and family is very important indeed, but religious

communities also have a key role to play in eradicating racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism. In the midst of tragedy and challenges, God stands ready to rekindle every heart that is broken, and to restore those who have suffered great harm.

What the wise Solomon wrote remains true: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (Proverbs 10:12)

True faith does not release humans from responsibility for the world or the obligation both to respect human dignity and to struggle for justice and peace. On the contrary, it strengthens our

commitment to action and magnifies our affirmation for freedom and human dignity.

Thank you again for this honor today, for the honor of your fellowship and friendship.

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