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# THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ADDRESSES THE VII CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS




The two-day interreligious event kicked off this week in Kazakhstan’s capital of Nur-Sultan.Government officials and spiritual leaders from around the globe gathered this week in Kazakhstan for the 7th Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

The interreligious event themed ‘The Role of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in the Spiritual and Social Development of Human Civilization in the Post-Pandemic Period’ included representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shintoism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and other religions, including His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, the Head of the Catholic Church Pope Francis, Egypt’s Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, among others.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III gave the following speech:

“Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary,

Honoured Fellow Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We wish to express our gratitude to the leadership of this Congress for your invitation to address this distinguished gathering of religious leaders and scholars from all over the world. We are gathered here in a season, unprecedented in our lifetime, of widespread and deep conflict and war, economic instability, the displacement of populations, the ongoing consequences of pandemic, and profound political and social divisions in almost every corner of our world.

And we gather here primarily as those who are representatives of our several religious traditions. At the heart of all great historic religious traditions are the values of peace-making, justice, and reconciliation. All religious traditions have at their heart the supreme value of peace: peace between God and humanity, peace within the human family, and peace between humanity and creation.

An Orthodox Christian perspective on peace and peace-making begins with the peace that is at the heart of God himself. As we read in the New Testament, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt. 5:9). Indeed, according to Saint Paul, from God comes perfect peace, the peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Peace is the foundation of all divinely-ordered relationship.

We who come from Jerusalem – which means “the foundation of Peace” – understand the power of peace which gives birth to co-existence, mutual respect, and harmony. Peace is the mother of harmony, because if there is no peace in the human heart, where the spirit of God dwells, there can be no peace among fellow human beings or among the rest of creation. This yearning in our human nature for peace draws us, whatever our religious tradition, away from the pettiness of the self-interest that leads to violence and conflict to a new and radical restraint and to a concern for the other, the stranger, the one in need.

Peace is born of compassion, and to seek peace is an act of the will on the part of the believer. As it is said in the Holy Bible:

let them turn away from evil and do good;

let them seek peace and pursue it. (1 Pet. 3:11)

And it is also written:

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;

righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (Ps. 84 [85]:11)

Here we see the power of peace and peace-making that is a divine commandment, and therefore we are to take this into serious consideration and translate it into real action.

The reality on the ground is that we are confronted by indisputable challenges. The whole of humanity is under real threat. Therefore it is our moral mission and our moral obligation as religious leaders to do our utmost to help our civic and political leaders to take into account the importance of peace. For God is a "God not of disorder (which is ἀκαταστασία in Greek), but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). Furthermore we should be reminded that we must "pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace" (2 Tim. 2:22) and that "peace and security" (1 Thess. 5:3) are at the heart of God's will for the human family.

There is no denying that humanity throughout the ages has suffered from war and violence. War and violence are not from God, and this is why the great Prophet Isaiah is exhorting us to remind us of our responsibilities, and not to be idle, by telling us:

they shall beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation;

neither shall they learn war any more. (Is. 2:4)

This is not just a poetic sentiment; this is a divine challenge to all who hold positions of authority. So the impossible becomes possible.

May Almighty God, the God of peace, from whom we learn the power of peace, enlighten our minds and guide our thoughts during this Congress, and may God give us the strength and the wisdom to return to our countries and communities renewed in our commitment to be messengers of God’s peace-building in our time.

Thank you again for hosting us.”

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