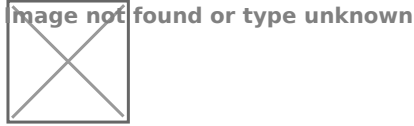


04/08/2023

Welcoming Remarks by Archbishop Elpidophoros At the Presentation of Religicide: Confronting the Roots of Anti-Religious Violence



Dear friend, Dr. Georgette Bennett,

Dear Rev. Mark Fowler,

Beloved sisters and brothers,

It is a distinct privilege and pleasure to welcome to the Saint Nicholas National Shrine a close friend and collaborator of our Church, Dr. Georgette Bennett, and so many of our ecumenical and interfaith friends and partners. I am also very grateful to Rev. Mark Fowler, CEO of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, for approaching us with this unique project.

We are here for the presentation of her new book, which she authored with Jerry White: *Religicide: Confronting the Roots of Anti-Religious Violence*. In all of New York City, I cannot think of a more appropriate setting for understanding this insightful neologism, "Religicide." For it was here at Ground Zero, that we witnessed how religion is weaponized for the destruction of others, thus leading to the destruction of religion, to which this book so eloquently speaks.

Every person who died on 9/11 was a spiritual being, as well as a sentient one. Whether we name that quality "soul," "spirit," "atman," or "anatman," as human beings, we are designed to recognize in one another the "capacity for the Divine" – that we are all capax Dei.

When this recognition disappears, the human person, who is so capable of beauty, goodness, mercy and generosity, becomes equally capable of the most cruel and destructive evil.

Throughout the march of human history, the weaponization of religion and the weaponization against religion have been dual plagues that have inflicted incalculable suffering on our human family.

And even now, when our exploration of space has led us to understand that we all have to live together on this “Big Blue Marble,” we still see the kind of intolerance and prejudice that leads to destruction. It is as if we have learned nothing, especially after the horrors of the Twentieth Century.

That is why Dr. Bennett’s message is so important for us today. And so important in this place, where a religious house of worship was destroyed, along with so many living images of God. And why it had to be resurrected. To restore all that we were able to, because we each have a duty – a responsibility – to leave our world better than we found it. A truth known to the Ancient Greeks, and immortalized in the Ephebic Oath of Athens:

Καὶ τὴν πατρίδα οὐκ ἐλάσσω παραδώσω, πλείω δὲ καὶ ἀρείω ὅσης ἂν παραδέξωμαι.

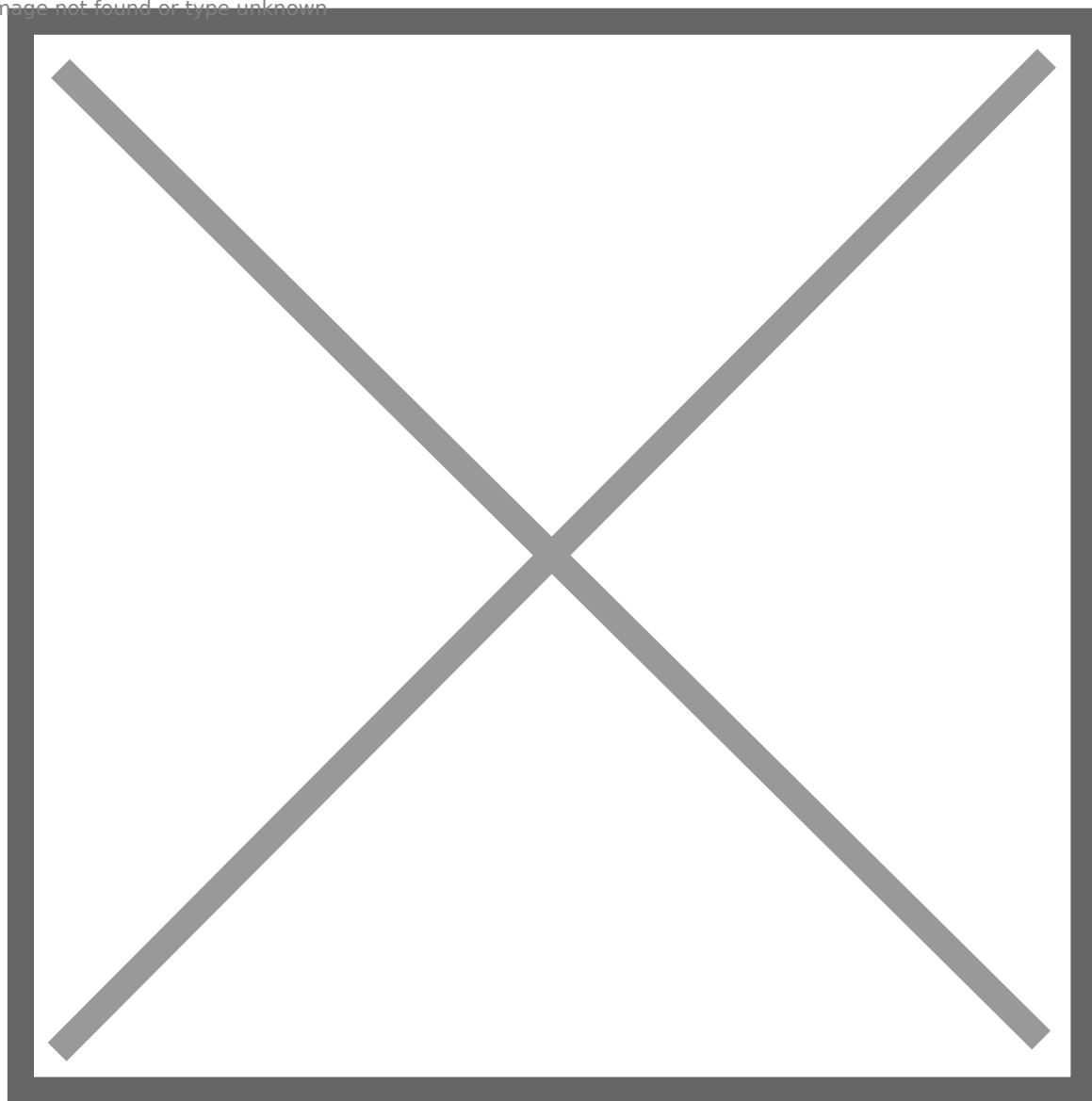
I shall not leave my city any less but rather greater than I found it.

This is very much the mission of the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at the rebuilt World Trade Center – to give to our City and our world a better future than we found.

Finally, allow me to express the profound thanks of us all to Dr. Bennett, for her lifelong commitment to raising the consciousness of the human family. Her work, the work of the late Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum, the work of his friend and my predecessor, the ever-memorable Archbishop Iakovos, this is the current in which we must all swim. For it is the movement of the human family toward peace, mutual trust and understanding, and, ultimately, love.

Thank you all for coming this afternoon. You are always most welcome!

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