

PARTICIPATION OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III AT THE “EAST- WEST DIALOGUE PEACE-BUILDING SEMINAR”

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III addressed the “East-West Dialogue Peace-Building Seminar,” which took place in Jordan, at the King Hussein Bin Talal Convention Center on August 12th, 2009.

During His address, His Beatitude expanded on the following matters:

- 1) The great importance of the seminar for the potential contribution of peaceful relations in the area.
- 2) The unique and symbiotic relationship that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, now over two thousand years old, has developed with the Arab Muslim world, and in particular with the Muslim faithful of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
- 3) The efforts for peace that have been actualized in the area, such as the “Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land”, and the peaceful role that the Patriarchate can play to the forthcoming generations in the context of the basic principles of Christianity.
- 4) The role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the region and the peaceful coexistence of the Islamic world with the adherents of the other monotheistic religions.

The following is the full text of the speech given by His

Beatitude at the seminar:

Remarks at the East-West Dialogue

Peace-Building Seminar

at the king Hussein Bin Talal Convention Center

Jordan

12 August 2009

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

“Your Royal Highness Prince Ghazi,

Distinguished Participants in this Seminar,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We greet you warmly on the occasion of this important seminar and we applaud the choice of subject for our work. In the difficult endeavor of the resolution of conflict and of building and sustaining peace, the art of dialogue and listening is of supreme consequence.

It is right, also, that we mark at this seminar the leading role that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has played as a “home of peace initiatives”. We salute especially the role of His Majesty, King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein, and His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi, whose tireless efforts on behalf of all the peoples of our region and for the promotion of mutual understanding and respect among people of different cultural, ethnic and religious identity are well-known both here and around the world.

In this context we are reminded of the proclamation of *The Amman Message* by His Majesty in 2004, which is itself both an important exposition of the tenets of Islam as well as a milestone in the quest of peaceful co-existence between Islam and those of the other monotheistic faiths.

In these few brief remarks we would like first to highlight the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in our region. Jordan is indeed the only (Arab) Islamic country in the Middle East in which there is true freedom of religion. Here, where the majority of the population is Muslim, there are flourishing communities of those who adhere to other faiths, especially Christianity. All citizens are given equal protection under the law regardless of religious affiliation and we know from our own experience that Christian and Muslim live side by side in peaceful co-existence.

But more than this, all Jordanian citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, have equal opportunities and rights, and we note the presence of Christians at every level of the society, including business and government.

This integration is a significant achievement and may serve as a model for other countries of our region. We have a long history of living together and we know and understand each other's culture and customs.

As we think particularly of the subject of this seminar – the art of dialogue and of listening for conflict resolution and peace-building – we recall the familiar words of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Luke (6:31), Jesus enunciates a central principle of Christian ethics, a principle that is shared by almost every religious tradition in one form or another:

“Do to others as you would have them to do to you”.

Known often as the **“Golden Rule”** this teaching is the basis of what we call the “ethnic of reciprocity”, that fundamental

understanding of human society that one has a right to just treatment and one has a responsibility to ensure the same just treatment of others.

This is the basis of all proper dialogue and all effective listening.

The Christian faith is not solely a private, personal matter. Christians are commanded by Our Lord to show forth their daily lives. In the Gospel of Matthew (5:16), Jesus reminds us of this with these words: ***“Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”.***

This is a further summons to the Church to be actively involved in the kind of dialogue and listening that leads to the resolution of conflict and the building of lasting and durable peace.

If we may speak for a moment in more theological terms, to listen effectively is not dissimilar from the practice of prayer. Whatever we are engaged in the public liturgical prayer of the Community, or the discipline of private personal prayer and devotion, prayer is first and foremost the act of placing oneself in the presence of God in order to listen. Without the openness of the Community of faith and the individual believer to God in this profound act of listening, there can be no progress in the spiritual life. This is, we believe, a crucial basis for understanding the task of listening to our fellow human beings.

We have good models upon which to build.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, having existed in this region for 2000 years, has developed deep symbiotic ties with the Arab Muslim world in general and with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in particular. We know the peoples of different religious traditions can live together in peaceful co-existence, for we see its fruits here. And in this way we

believe that we have the full trust of others in the Islamic world.

We also believe that the Patriarchate can be a true bridge of trust in the task of the healing of memories. As we all know, memories in this region are deep and have a lasting effect on our common life. As we think of East-West dialogue, we cannot forget, for example, the searing memory of the crusades, which still colors the understanding of many in our region towards the West. This is not the only memory that must be healed, and we can all think of others.

This is not to say that others do not have an urgent part to play in the peace process. But we do believe that the Patriarchate has a unique role in reducing the effect of such bad memories between East and West. Islam first met Christianity in the Orthodox Church, and the best way forward in the healing of memories is in the mutual understanding – the dialogue and listening – between the original local Church of this region and Islam.

In this connection we note also the work of two other bodies that are engaged in similar work to this seminar. Last March we were in London for the C-1 World Dialogue which is co-chaired by the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Dr. Ali Gomaa, and the Bishop of London, Dr. Richard Chartres. His Excellency Dr. Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, and we are founding Vice Chairs of this Dialogue. His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi also had had a significant role in the establishment of this Dialogue.

In addition to this Dialogue, there is the work of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, which continues to be a force for conflict resolution and peace-making in our region. Only last week, members of the Council met in Jerusalem to examine the question of education and the provision of textbooks for schools in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority that seek to tell truthfully the complex

and often difficult story of our Holy Land.

We cannot emphasize too strongly how significant the subject of this seminar is, and the potential contribution that this seminar can make to the peace process. And we would also like to emphasize the urgent need for actions to follow words. In the theological traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the concepts for “word” and “action” are closely related, and we must live out that relationship in all that we do to ensure that this region may become an even greater beacon of hope to those who seek to build a new future for humanity throughout the world.

We thank you for your invitation to give these remarks, and we pray for God’s blessing upon His Majesty and all the Royal Family, and upon all the people of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as well as upon all of you and upon the work of this seminar.

God bless you – Thank you”

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