



Address by Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk at the General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia



On 30 September 2023, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, spoke at the XV General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia taking place in Kottayam (Kerala, India).

Esteemed Dr Chunakara,

Dear participants in the Assembly,

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church I greet all those present today at the 15th General Assembly

of the Christian Conference of Asia in Kottayam.

Many years of fruitful cooperation bind together the Moscow Patriarchate, the Christian Conference of Asia and the Churches in the region. Through the efforts of Russian missionaries, Christianity came to North Asia – Siberia and the Far East. Today, Asia constitutes a considerable part of the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. Our Church has dozens of dioceses in the Asian regions of Russia, which cover three fourths of the country's territory, and in the Central Asian republics, with millions of Christians living there. Russian missionaries were among the first to bring Christianity to China and Japan, and the autonomous Orthodox Churches are present there now. The Moscow Patriarchate's communities are actively developing in Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines. In 2018, these communities were unified into the Patriarchal Exarchate of South-East Asia.

For decades, the Russian Orthodox Church and the traditional Christian Churches in the region have maintained fraternal relations. We see dynamic progress in our Church's cooperation with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The Moscow Patriarchate maintains contacts with the Councils of Churches in Korea, Singapore, the Philippines and Indonesia. When serving as chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia visited almost every country in Asia, promoting Orthodox presence there and fostering relations with other Christian confessions in the spirit of brotherly cooperation. At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church's parishes were largely instrumental in maintaining contacts between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Christian Conference of Asia – the oldest regional ecumenical organization.

Nowadays, Asia has become one of the centers of global Christianity, and local Churches play a very important role in setting the agenda of inter-Christian relations, raising various critical issues that relate to mission, diakonia and bearing public witness in today's society.

This year the Assembly's focus is on one of such topics evoking keen response throughout the Christendom. It is the relationships between humanity, God and creation.

The Holy Scripture tells us that on the sixth day of creation God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:31). The created world knew neither death nor corruption. Nothing was superfluous, and every living being, including the human being, was in its proper place.

However, because of the forefathers' sin, death entered the world and, as St. Paul puts it, the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now (Rom 8:22). Death is a direct consequence of sin. As Christians, we believe that overcoming sin is the only way to obtain salvation, in which the whole

creation will partake. According to the Holy Scripture, the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:21).

Thus, the renewal of the earthly world is directly linked to human salvation, which the Orthodox theology calls “deification.” By freeing ourselves from the bondage to sin, casting away passions and acquiring virtues we get sanctified and become partakers of the Heavenly Kingdom, which, as our Lord Jesus Christ said, is within you (Lk 17:21). Just like a city... set on an hill cannot be hid (Mt 5:14), so members of the Church in their holiness cannot but exert beneficial influence on their neighbours and the whole world. Within the Russian Orthodox tradition, this idea was eloquently expressed by the Venerable Seraphim of Sarov, who said, “Acquire the spirit of peace, and thousands will be saved around you.”

The world today is faced with many problems arising from human pride, greed and other passions that result, among other things, in a mounting ecological crisis. In this regard, the mission of the Christian Church is to bear witness to Christ, for there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). In Him alone we can find the way to put an end to the suffering of creation and overcome the discords troubling our world.

I would like to wish you successful work at the Assembly and point out that the Russian Orthodox Church is always open for cooperation with all Christians in Asia. I believe that this Assembly will mark an important stage in promoting relations between the Christian Churches in the region.

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