



Metropolitan Anthony takes part in the Assyrian Church of the East Conference dedicated to the First Ecumenical Council



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On September 28, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, participated in the plenary session of the International Conference of the Assyrian Church of the East marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The event is being held at the Catholic University of Erbil in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq. The forum is chaired by the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East, His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, with Bishop Mar Elia Isaac of Baghdad serving as Chairman of the Organizing Committee.

Participants in the Conference include Metropolitan Ghattas of Baghdad and Kuwait (Antiochian

Orthodox Church); Archbishop Bashar Warda, head of the Erbil Eparchy of the Chaldean Catholic Church; Archbishop Nicodemus Daoud Sharaf, head of the Mosul, Kirkuk and Kurdistan Eparchy of the Syriac Orthodox Church; Archbishop Nathanael Nizar Semaan of Adiabene, head of the parishes of the Syriac Catholic Church in the Kurdistan Region; hierarchs of the Assyrian Church of the East and other Christian denominations of Iraq; Rev. Charles Luanga Ssuna, Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Baghdad; Rev. Hyacinthe Destivelle, staff member of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Holy See; as well as church scholars, biblical scholars, historians and theologians from different countries.

Addressing the gathering, Metropolitan Anthony conveyed greetings to the participants on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. The hierarch recalled that "more than 20 years ago the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, then serving as Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, visited Iraq, including its northern regions. His acquaintance with this biblical land left a profound impression and a grateful memory in the heart of His Holiness."

The metropolitan went on to note that the territory of ancient Mesopotamia is "a land which preserves the memory of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament who lived here, as well as of the holy apostles who proclaimed the Gospel at the dawn of the Christian era – among them the apostles Thomas, Thaddeus and Mari, venerated as enlighteners of the East. The Russian Orthodox Church has for centuries maintained fraternal and very close relations with the traditional Christian communities of the Middle East. We are united by a shared religious and cultural heritage and fidelity to the one apostolic tradition."

In this context, Metropolitan Anthony emphasized, "the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which we commemorate today, holds special significance for all of us. This event remains a starting point for the consolidation of the entire Christian world, for the formation of the most important doctrinal tenets of the faith and of theology as a whole. The conciliar experience of correctly interpreting foundational theological terms and its approach to resolving disputes in the spirit of sincere, common pursuit of right decisions remain ever relevant. Finally, the participants of that Council provided a remarkable example of Christian unity, being inspired by the words of the Apostle Paul that there is one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all (Eph. 4:6)."

At the same time, Metropolitan observed, "in later times we all greatly lacked this unity. Christians suffered much, including due to their divisions. This was reflected all too vividly in the fate of Middle Eastern Christians. It also applies to the very recent past, of which we have all been witnesses. In recent years many churches, monasteries and even entire cities were destroyed by terrorists. Hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless and driven from their native lands; tens of thousands met a martyr's death. Many shrines and historical monuments remain destroyed and desecrated."

Yet, Metropolitan Anthony reminded the audience, “the supreme truth testifies unceasingly that God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7). A convincing confirmation of this is the new revival of faith and Christian life – including here, in the northern regions of Iraq.”

Nevertheless, he added, “the modern world, which increasingly walks in darkness (John 12:35), poses common challenges to us. Our Churches cannot remain silent, aware of our responsibility not only for the future of our own flock, but for human civilization as a whole. We are deeply concerned about the rapid growth of secular processes in contemporary society, including the rejection of moral traditions. Especially urgent today is the task of jointly defending the Christian understanding of morality, family, the protection of the environment, and many other immutable values given by God. A proper response to these challenges is impossible without entrusting ourselves to God, for Holy Scripture testifies that ‘the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that wins souls is wise’ (Prov. 11:30).”

Metropolitan Anthony expressed his conviction that “the study of the legacy of the First Ecumenical Council and its participants – the Holy Fathers of the Church – can help us rightly understand the causes of many past tragedies and prevent their recurrence in the future.”

In conclusion, Metropolitan expressed his hope that the conference would serve this purpose, wishing God’s help and fruitful work to all its participants.

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