

The speech by the Archbishop George A. Frendo, O.P

Catholic Church of Albania

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Religions are for peace

In principle, religions are for peace. If any religion serves to incite struggles, racism, injustice or discrimination, then it is not a true religion, but only a caricature of the same.

On the other hand, we must also bear in mind that peace is not something that can be attained automatically. Peace is not inertia, nor is it simply the absence of war. If this were the case, then the place which would merit the title of “a peaceful haven” would be the cemetery: corpses are never at war with one another. But I dare say that we need to “struggle” for peace. It might seem paradoxical or even absurd, to make such a statement: “we have to fight for peace”. But this is the truth! For peace demands being committed to overcome all those elements or situations that prevent the construction of peace.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul makes this interesting affirmation: “[Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Jews and gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility”. Hence a commitment for peace demands that we struggle to overcome whatever might open the way for war.

And I consider this to be our mission as religious leaders. We boast of our peaceful inter-religious cohabitation in Albania, but let us never take for granted this inter-religious harmony. Let us not have our minds totally at rest because we are living peacefully with one and other, for we have no guarantee that we are immune against all dangers.

For this reason I deem it very important to control extremist and dangerous elements within our religious communities. Perhaps, so far, we have emphasized the need to control fundamentalist elements and have become stuck in this effort. But we must emphasize even more the need to educate for peace and to lay the grounds for more secure peaceful inter-religious future. I suggest four important steps

First, may all of us, Christians and Muslims, educate our faithful, since early childhood, to respect the dignity of every human. Both the Holy Bible and Koran, assign a special place and dignity to the human person in creation, and describe the human person as a special creature with a special relationship with God the Creator. Human life is sacred, and nobody has the right to impinge upon any other person's dignity or human rights (including the right to religious freedom). This point ought to be understood and appraised also by all teachers in all schools, whether public or private.

Secondly, we must, at all costs, avoid forms of proselytism, that is to say exerting pressure on others so that they accept our religion. One form of proselytism, which is very widely adopted by sects, implies knocking at the doors of families, whom they do not even know, trying to persuade them that they are following the wrong religion and thereby presenting them the doctrine of the sect, sometimes presenting it as the religion that can heal them also from physical illnesses.

Thirdly, we ask from civil authorities that they take special care to avoid any form of discrimination among different religious communities. The Constitutions of the Republic of Albania state, in article 10, paragraph 3: "The State acknowledges the equality among religious communities". Those in authority must scrupulously respect such norm, lest they mistakenly show any discrimination among the religions officially recognized by the State.

Fourthly, on our part, as leaders of religious communities, let each one of us always show full solidarity with other religious community whenever this suffers some terroristic act or a clear serious injustice. I think that we have delivered a very positive message to our people when we, as an Inter-Religious Council, have made common declarations when two horrible terroristic acts were committed, the first one against the Muslims in New Zealand, and the other one against Christians in Sri Lanka. People need to see such good signs of solidarity among us.

So let us be not only guardians of peace, but also prophets and apostles of peace worldwide.