

GOOD WILL MESSAGE
By Bishop ALEXANDER-
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To the Conference of the Roman-Catholic Bishops under the Theme:
"Seeking the Way of Peace"

March 11, 2003

~ Your Grace the Archbishop of Abuja, president of the Conference of the Roman-Catholic Bishops of Nigeria and beloved brother in Christ ~

Brother-bishops of the Roman-Catholic Church,

~ Your Excellences the representatives of the State

~ Representatives of other Christian communities,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"The Peace of Christ may be with all of us".

It gives me a pleasure and honor to attend this opening session of the Annual Conference of the bishops of the Roman-Catholic Church, and also to be in the midst of brothers as we all work in this country with real love and true loyalty for the service of the people of God, for the perfection of the world.

This assembly by itself confirms in a very realistic manner the heartfelt care of the Roman-Catholic Church of Nigeria to further improve our Christian mission. In that sense, I would like to believe that my presence here, among dear brothers, shows in the most obvious way that the unity and the peace in the Christian world can be a real historical fact, as it is a gift and a command of God, both in local and universal level.

We are here in order to make manifest our common path of the Christian history in the first millennium, which could be enlarged in any possible way, taking into consideration the fact that we have the responsibility in front of the Triune God and His people to correct the divisive and sinful mistakes of the past. The sacramental memory of the history of our salvation in the person of Christ, basically in the Eucharist, can serve as the basis for the stability of the local churches, and furthermore it can offer the

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r certainty that the unity and the peace among the Christians can be a reality in history,
t just as the material elements of bread and wine are blessed and through the apostolic
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e succession become the Body and Blood of Christ.

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r In the light of the fear of the looming war in Iraq, as well as other areas where there are
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, pockets of misunderstanding and conflict due to intolerance and fundamentalism, the
, theme of this meeting "Seeking the way of peace" becomes even more timely and
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t pertinent, because "peace" is "a real friend" - of the human nature.

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a From a theological point of view the term "peace" can be approached in many ways,
n such as:

a) Inner peace in one's own self, not only as a balance between physical abilities and
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f mental powers (health), but as a global rehabilitation of the whole human being, as God
f created him, and Christ united him with His divine nature.

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r b) Peace among the various churches of this land, as the unity of the Church was the first
t principle of the apostolic mission and the primary vision of the ecclesiastical
h organization.

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c) Peace within the Christian world, as a means of fulfilling the divine will, as it is
c revealed in Christ's prayer for "all to be one".

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r d) Peace among religions, cultures, nations and civilizations in the principle of tolerance
t for further and complete service of peoples and nations.

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t It is clear that the Church does not interpret the meaning of peace as a simple opposite of
y war. The patristic teaching always sees inner peace as liberation from the fear of death,
t no less than as unity of all of us with each other. Christ is the sole keeper of the totality of
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a peace, thus He is called "the giver of peace". In other words "peace" and "unity" are
t inseparable. Peace cannot be realized as a human achievement, but is a result of human
t kind's participation in the Trinitarian life. In Christ's peace nobody walks alone, as an
h individual, following a private path. Each human being is called to respond to the
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Church's invitation for a personal, common and united process towards

the heavenly Kingdom. Individualism has no place in this task, even though individualism is becoming a serious challenge to the ecclesiastical mindset today. Therefore, the Church practices peace by pointing to the figure of Christ, Whom we must follow personally, and not any model of individual piety. In that sense, peace is identified with unity, and both become signposts to our innermost fulfillment.

Just as Christ has united the divine and the human natures in His own person, so the mission of the Church, as the body of Christ, is always based on the true consciousness that unity can be realized, that peace can reign in the world and, finally, that our Christian heritage can be transmitted to future generations. St Basil wrote that "he who seeks peace, really seeks Christ". Hence, behold the time of peace, behold the time of love, and behold the time of mutual understanding and cooperation.

Being certain, that the peace will be the only unshakable rock of our mission as leaders and servants of the Church, I pray for the unity of the Christian body and the peace of the world and I repeat with the primates of the Orthodox Church who gathered on Christmas 2000 AD a remarkable passage of their message:

" ... in caring and striving for the unity of the Church, we have in mind the deeper human search to transcend various divisions, oppositions, conflicts and battles. We also recall the human thirst for peace and cooperation, and the vision of a society where everyone lives in harmony ... We shall strive to render perceptible and tangible for the entire world the saving reality, that, in Christ and through the Church, God is not far from humanity, but rather is everywhere present and near everyone; He is Emmanuel, God with us ... ".

The peace of God and Christ's blessings may be with all of us, as persons, Churches and nations now and forever.

May the same God and His Holy Spirit enlighten you dear Brothers and give you the wisdom needed to articulate and achieve the goal of your Conference, for the glory of His Holy Name. Amen

