

Proclamation of the opening
of the Conference proceedings
from His All-Holiness Bartholomew,
Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

Your Excellency, the President of the Hellenic Republic,
Your Beatitude Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Mr. Hieronymos,
President of the Organizing Committee of the Congress,
Your Beatitudes, Brothers Heads of the Orthodox Churches,
Honorable representatives of other sister Churches,
Most Reverend and Faithful Brethren, other Prelates,
Your Excellencies and Honorable Representatives of the Authorities,
Select Attendees;

We are expressing the thanks of Our Mediocrity to the President and the members of the present Congress's Organizing Committee for the kind invitation to address our greetings at the opening of the Congress.

A whole century has been completed from the publication of the first issue of the journal *Theologia*, the world-famous scientific organ of the Holy Synod of the Most Holy Church of Greece. The most prominent representatives of the Sacred Science have offered their theological testimony in the journal. In its pages, the greatest challenges with which the Church and theology have been confronted since 1923 until today are reflected – challenges and crises of a spiritual, ecclesiastical, religious and cultural nature, relations between the Church and State, the Ecumenical Movement, secularization, the explosion of technology, the ecological problem, evaluative reversals, radical changes in the field of education, and much more. All these have had major impact on theology, which is called upon to function in accordance with the signs of times, teaching the fine testimony of the Gospel of freedom in

Christ. Theology is nourished by the sources of our faith and the life of the Church; it listens to the pulse of the present and always speaks by turning its attention on the contemporary man; in addition to the occasional challenges, it records and exploits the positive perspectives of civilization. It has been rightly said that theology had in the past, and it still has, the need for theologians who are “pious and intelligent”, “decathletes in knowledge, sensitivity and offering”.

The journal *Theologia* is entering its second century of life, with a legacy and heritage of its so far successful and creative course, fidelity to the Orthodox tradition and relevance, the conviction that man is not only a citizen of the world, but also a “*citizen of Heaven*”, a being who seeks an ultimate point of reference beyond the saeculum – culture, politics, science, economics, and earthly bliss. Neither the rise in the standard of living, nor social progress or scientific knowledge fully cover and satisfy man, who indeed does not live “on bread alone” («ἐπ' ἀρτῷ μόνῳ»)¹.

Science is most obviously the “great power” of our age. Still, the faith in God is also a great power; it answers man's profoundest existential questions. As it has been aptly observed, the dizzying progress of science is due to the fact that it has been resigned from the attempt to pose and answer similar questions, which are at the very core of philosophy and theology².

The fact, of course, that science is not interested in these questions has not led to their disappearance, nor does it constitute a ruling and a criterion for their importance or insignificance. In fact, the issue of the meaning of life seems nowadays to lie at the heart of people's quests, something that is also evidenced by the phenomenon of the so-called “return of God” and a new and lively interest in philosophy. This means that faith and knowledge, these two outstanding powers of the mind, are not opposed to each other, but are cooperating and partnering in man's ministry.

The theme of the Conference aptly reminds us that humanity is heading towards the “immaterial reality of late modernity”. The

1. See *Matthew* 4, 4.

2. See Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, „Gottesfrage und Naturwissenschaften“, in: Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, *Deutlichkeit*, München 1981, pp. 117-138, esp. p. 126.

discourse related to the “immaterial reality” refers to the new situations and challenges associated with the dominance of the Internet and, more generally, scientific and technological developments in our daily lives. These phenomena are transforming the way individuals and peoples live in all its dimensions; they are directing our desires and needs, leading humanity to an evaluative reorientation. Nevertheless, no sane person can deny the many benefits of technology. Resistance to certain trends in technological civilization does not in any way imply a total rejection of it.

We all know that civilizations are never definitive solutions to the human enigma. Obviously, both modern technology and the coming “immaterial reality” represent an extremely important milestone in the historical course of humanity, the central axiom of which, for us Christians, is «τὸ πάντων καινῶν καινότατον, τὸ μόνον καινὸν ὑπὸ τὸν ἡλιον»³, the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. This all-saving “everlasting mystery” («ἀεὶ μωστήριον») is represented by the Church of Christ, which, in the age of “immateriality”, will also highlight the man’s material dimension, will point to the variety and beauty of the creation, will proclaim that indifference to the material world does not constitute a theologically sound understanding and consequence of the “not of this world” («οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου»). This Truth is a source of inspiration for our secular habitation, sharpens our sense of how we should act, and offers support for the most advantageous use of the technological achievements.

Fully confident that the presentations and discussions will cover the wide range of topics of the Conference, we declare the opening of its proceedings and wish it success in every respect.

Christ within us!

3. See St. John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, 45, PG 94, 934B.