

ADDRESS OF
PATRIARCH ALEKSY II OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA
AT THE BANQUET GIVEN BY THE APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION
NEW YORK, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1993

Most Honorable Rabbi Arthur Schneier,
ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to sincerely thank you, Mr. President, respected Trustees and all members of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation for the honor you have bestowed on me and those accompanying me by sponsoring this festive reception on the occasion of our visit to the United States of America.

It is not by chance that the Russian Orthodox Church has enjoyed a long history of rich, friendly, and fruitful cooperation with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. The noble ideals of reconciliation, justice, observance of human rights, and much of what makes up the priceless potential of values common to all humanity, are successfully proclaimed and defended by your organization, which is itself a good example of successful inter-religious cooperation.

The high spiritual value of an appeal to conscience is especially necessary in today's world divided by strife and conflict. Quite often these conflicts result in armed struggles which lead to wars that claim many victims and engender great suffering among civilian populations, as well as the destruction of cities and villages. Although these conflicts as a rule are political or ethnic in nature, it is not unusual for them to have religious overtones.

Every person has an innate moral code in which he is guided by his conscience. In this way the will of God is manifested through the conscience and from this it follows that Divine Providence for every person is engraved in his heart from the beginning. The conscience testifies to the likeness of God in every person and to his need of fulfilling God's commandments.

The power and greatness of a conscience can be indomitable in relation to a person's desires and deeds. The more profound a person's faith, the greater the manifestation of his conscience and the more a person is possessed by passions, the deeper he succumbs to sin and iniquity. The sicker his conscience becomes, the quicker it comes to its death with which the person enters a state of consciencelessness.

A turning away from spirituality by people, which is precisely

Address of Patriarch Alexey II
Appeal of Conscience Foundation
September 28, 1993
Page 2

linked to sickness of the conscience, is in our day, we believe, a truly world-wide problem. It engenders the moral emptiness of a person, causes the disintegration of family ties, distorts the upbringing of children, disfigures the moral world of youth, opens the way to drug abuse, and leads to the entrance on to a path of iniquity and crime. Woe to the nations which are under the authority of aspiritual people deprived of conscience. Woe also to all of humanity because its fate at present could also be in immoral hands.

The spiritual vacuum, exceptional in its scope in Russia and in the many other governments on the territory of the former Soviet Union, has undoubtedly weakened the moral potential of society and has therefore negatively reflected on the process of positive transformation in the lives of our peoples by slowing it down and disfiguring it. An appeal to conscience, an attempt to awaken it in every person, and thereby in society as a whole, without which a genuinely democratic government cannot exist, is the goal of the foundation whose guests we are today.

A good conscience opens the way to reconciliation which for Christians, according to the apostle Paul, is the fulfillment of God's commandment (II Cor. 5:18-19). We know that this is also the position of those religions whose representatives participate in the work of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. In our day reconciliation is precisely the antidote which can stop and heal conflicts which have arisen in nations in our part of the world and other regions of the world and are of a nationalistic, ethnic, political, and at times religious nature.

Those of us who are believers are currently preoccupied with a common goal - to make our era be remembered in history, not as a time of division and resistance, but rather as a time of successful dialogue, of open searching, and to find a solution for all the most complicated national and international problems.

The history of your great country, where people of many various nationalities, faiths, and cultures live peacefully side by side, is testimony that such a peaceful co-existence is not an illusion.

Together with those accompanying me, I have come to your country at the invitation of the primate of the Orthodox Church in America, His Beatitude, THEODOSIUS, Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan of All America and Canada, in order to inaugurate the festivities celebrating the Bicentennial of Orthodoxy in North America.

With great satisfaction, we have noted during our visits to Alaska, San Francisco, Chicago and New York, that Americans, both Orthodox as well as members of other Christian faiths and other religions, gratefully remember the Russian Orthodox immigrants who have made significant contributions to the development of all spheres of life in their new homeland. They were people of various social positions, education, and professions, but were all united by a profound common desire to participate in the development of American society. Two hundred years ago, monks from the Holy Transfiguration Valaam Monastery and the Nativity Monastery set foot on the shores of the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. While preaching the word of God and converting the local population to the Orthodox faith, they were able to, at the same time, impart more effective agricultural methods, nautical navigation and other skills. They brought enlightenment and the basics of various sciences. We must, at this point, give special mention to the leading role in the study of an acclimatization to the North American continent which was played by the Russian entrepreneur, the merchant Gregory Ivanovich Shelikov, and the linguist and ethnographer, Archpriest John Veniaminov (1797-1879), who later became bishop and metropolitan of Moscow, whose scientific work has not lost its significance even today.

We can sincerely proclaim that Orthodoxy, as preached on the American continent by Russian missionaries, was a positive and transforming power bringing people the seeds of good, enlightenment, and love.

I would like to sincerely thank Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, the Trustees of the Foundation, and all of its members, and you, most honored guests, for your presence, for through the fellowship which we share today, you are sharing with us the festive celebration of the Bicentennial of Orthodox witness and service in North America and in this we see the acknowledgment of the great contributions of Orthodoxy to the historical development of the United States of America and of its significance for the present and future of your homeland.

I raise my glass for the health of all those here present and to a successful continuation of the fruitful work of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

OCA Translation
A.L. 09-21-93