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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 17th Inter-Christian Symposium

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, and to the participants in the 17th Inter-Christian Symposium, organized jointly by the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical University *Antonianum* and the Department of Theology of the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, taking place from 28 to 30 August 2024 in Trani, on the theme “‘What is man?’ (*Ps* 8:4) in the time of anthropological mutation”:

Message of the Holy Father

To my Venerable Brother
His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch
Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

With sentiments of cordial closeness, I greet the distinguished speakers and all the participants in the 17th Inter-Christian Symposium, organized jointly by the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical University *Antonianum* and the Department of Theology of the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, which will take place from 28 to 30 August 2024 in Trani, on the theme “‘What is man?’ (*Ps* 8:4) in the time of anthropological mutation”. In particular, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this unique experience of practical collaboration between Catholics and Orthodox, which has become by now a beautiful tradition.

The title of the Symposium refers to the time of anthropological mutation, but what is happening in our days could be defined as a fully-fledged revolution. The changes brought about by the information technology revolution, such as, for example, the development of artificial intelligence, and the incredible developments in the sciences, are forcing today’s men and women to rethink their identity, their role in the world and in society, and their vocation to transcendence. Indeed, the specific nature of the human being in creation as a whole, his uniqueness with regard to the other animals, and even his relationship with machines, are being constantly questioned. Furthermore, the way in which today’s men and women understand the fundamental experiences of

their existence, such as engendering, being born, and dying, are changing structurally. Faced with this ongoing anthropological revolution, it is not possible to react only with denial or criticism. On the contrary, there is a need for profound reflection, capable of renewing the thought and the choices to be made (cf. *Video Message on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture on the theme "Towards a necessary humanism"*, 23 November 2021).

This challenge affects all Christians, whatever Church they belong to. For this reason, it is particularly interesting that Catholics and Orthodox are promoting this reflection together. In particular, in the light of the teaching of the Sacred Scripture and Christian tradition, it is necessary to reiterate that every human being is endowed with dignity by the mere fact of existing, as a spiritual entity, created by God and destined for a filial relationship with Him (cf. *Eph 1:4-5*), regardless of whether or not he acts in accordance with this dignity, the socio-economic situations in which he lives, or his existential conditions. The defence of this dignity against very real threats such as poverty, war, exploitation and others is a common commitment for all Churches to work on together.

I gladly accompany the work of the 17th Inter-Christian Symposium with my prayers and, through the intercession of Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, patron saint of Trani, I invoke the Lord's blessing on all participants, trusting that they too will have the goodness to remember me in their prayers.

From the Vatican, 17th July 2024

FRANCIS
