

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESSES A MEDICAL CONGRESS FOR CHILDREN

On 11th May 2013 His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa closed the deliberations of the 13th Dermatological Symposium of the 3rd Dermatological Clinic of the Andreas Syggros Hospital, with an address, entitled "The Skin from Infancy to Puberty". The deliberations took place under the auspices of the ancient Patriarchate at the Athens Acropolis Museum.

Citing the exhortation of Plutarch "to love children from their fingertips up" (Children's Education, 3C), which constituted the source of inspiration for the Congress title, His Beatitude spoke of the relevance of the priestly and medical vocations, saying:

"This exhortation by Plutarch that we should love children with all our being to the tips of their fingers showcases the child as that existence to which the service of both the ministers of the body of Christ, the Church, as well as the ministers of the human body, those in medical science, are predominantly addressed and preferentially dedicated. This occurs on the one hand because, a child's soul, as a dynamic agent of the image and likeness of God, is often scarred by the choices of adults, it is stifled by daily reality, it is annihilated under a thick layer of emerging adulthood. On the other hand, as you have discussed during the preceding deliberations, a child's body is structurally and functionally vulnerable, it requires a particular medical approach in diagnosis and treatment of occurring illnesses and has the need of daily care".

Pointing out that the peculiarities of children are not only to do with age, but also with place, he stressed:

"I am among you because, as Primate of Orthodoxy in Africa, I wish to give a voice and a voice to millions of children who, in the dawn of their lives, have an uneven battle to fight amid threatening conditions of living of their entire existence. I wish to give a voice and voice to millions of children in Africa who seek love and justice in a hard and unjust world.

Faced with these terms of life the Mission of the Alexandrian Church calls on the people of Africa, particularly the children, to participate in the joyful news of the Gospel through the word (homily), the work (ministry), prayer and worship (Liturgy), the daily witness of Christian life. It restores souls to the tenets of Orthodoxy and strengthens our African brothers and sisters in their relationship with God and with each other. Continuing the first Christian dynamics of recruitment and transfiguration, it goes into action with the aim of a reconciled humanity and a restored creation.

Alongside the witness of evangelism, our provinces journey inseparably with the ministry of immediate viable needs. Schools, orphanages, clinics operate for the relief of children who are in need. Boreholes are opened for ensuring clean drinkable water, simple meals are prepared, training faculties and workshops are set up to guarantee a basic income for survival of children and their families".

Because of the struggle against HIV/AIDS, as one of the main causes of maternal and childhood deaths in sub-Saharan Africa, His Beatitude assured that:

"The Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa stands beside the medical community and supports every effort which aspires the halting of the dissemination and to the treatment of this fatal virus. From the moment that the foundation stone of Orthodoxy is respect of the uniqueness and the holiness of human existence, as a

creation in the image and likeness of God, our common path with every medical effort of practical implementation of this respect on an individual and collective level, is a given.

In particular, in collaboration with local groups of doctors and international medical organizations, we advocate the obvious need of increasing international funding for the research programmes for prevention, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of this viral disease. We advocate the vital need of increased access to the most necessary medical and pharmaceutical care for the vulnerable groups of the population. We advocate the pressing necessity of lifting the legal and technical barriers which do not allow access to cheap and safe antiretroviral medication for the suffering citizens of the deeply indebted countries of Africa.

We work to combat the stigma of prejudice, of family and social exclusion which accompany this disease. We struggle for the elimination of gender inequality and the shielding of the right to safe motherhood. We labour for medical and pharmaceutical benefits, similar to those enjoyed by the developed world in conjunction with ensuring proper nutrition and drinkable water.

We promote education as a basic means of development of local communities, a lifting of ignorance and development of individual and social conscience. We are searching for funding sources for scholarships for African medical students, pharmaceutical and psycho-social sciences, for future service to their fellows".

Accepting and welcoming the innovative proposal of the Director of the 3rd Dermatological Clinic of the Andreas Syggros Hospital, and Archon of the Patriarchate, Mr. Athanasios Petrides, for the creation of a Pan African Network of Tele-dermatology with its Headquarters at the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and implementation centre the Dermatological Clinic of the Andreas Syggros Hospital, His Beatitude reassured all of his love for the service and witness of all doctors and in conclusion, emphasized:

"I reaffirm my belief in all your work, remembering the words of Basil the Great: Whoever has no doctor has no medicine. For even he who has medicine, is as if he has none, if he does not know how to use it. I renew our mutual commitment for all of us to make every possible effort, each in his own way, so that the world can be educated in solidarity and respect for the child; this practical substantiation of the divine condescension that life must go on".

Commemorative gifts were then exchanged. It is worth noting that His Beatitude, who was accompanied by His Eminence George, Metropolitan of Guinea, his Patriarchal Representative in Athens and His Grace Nikodimos Bishop of Nitria, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, was welcomed and guided through the Acropolis Museum in Athens by the Director Mr. Dimitrios Pandermalis.