

# POPE'S VISIT TO MULTI-FAITH MEETING REPROVED BY LOCAL BISHOP

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Bishop Schneider questioned the pope's attendance at

a multi-faith event, saying it would undermine the status of the Catholic Church by presenting it in a “supermarket of religions.”

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On September 15th, the last day of his three-day visit to Kazakhstan, Pope Francis gave a [speech](#) at the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, during which he expressed the need for “men, women, and young people” to achieve world peace. Earlier that day, however, he had [met with local clergy](#) and was [publicly reproved](#) by local bishop Athanasius Schneider for repeatedly participating in multi-faith events that devalue the distinctness of the Catholic faith.

The congress assembled representatives of various faiths and denominations, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and many smaller religions. The goal of the congress was highlighted in a [final declaration](#): to promote religious pluralism and tolerance based on the equality of all people in the face of God.

“Peace is born of fraternity, it grows through the struggle against injustice and inequality,” said the pope, adding that “we, who believe in the Creator of all, must be on the front lines in promoting the growth of peaceful coexistence.”

]But not everyone was enamored with the pope’s participation in the event. Bishop Schneider, known for his rootedness in traditional values, suspects the pope’s participation could project an image of the Catholic church as “[simply one of the many religions](#).”

Although the congress was useful for promoting “mutual respect in the world,” as Schneider admits, he [warned against the inherent dangers](#) of such meetings, as they “undermine the uniqueness and absoluteness of Jesus Christ as Savior and of our mission to preach to all nations, to all religions, Jesus Christ.”

For Schneider, such multi-faith meetings “could give the impression of a supermarket of religions, and that is not correct, because there is only one true religion, which is the Catholic church founded by God himself, but commanded to all men, to all religions, to believe and accept his son Jesus Christ, the only savior.”

While not opposed to interconfessional dialogue, Schneider prefers it to be guided at the local level, rather than promoting it at international, mass events. The bishop would have the Catholic Church reconsider its presence at such congresses.

Some of the faithful challenged Schneider on his criticism of Pope Francis. He defended his remarks, [noting](#) that bishops “are not employees of the pope, we are brothers.”

“When in good conscience I feel that something is not correct or ambiguous I have to say something to the pope. This is collegiality, this is fraternity,” said Schneider, adding that he always tries to “do it through respect, through brotherly love, not through adulation.” He also encouraged bishops who disagree with the pope to speak their mind, rather than being caught in “adulations and incense,” or “behaving like an employee to a boss.”

Other Vatican officials, however, shared a different view. Msgr. Khaled Boutros Akasheh, the Vatican’s head of the Islamic relations department, was confident the pope’s visit would “[foster hope and interreligious dialogue](#).” The final declaration of the congress, signed by all present leaders, will also be distributed as an official document of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly.