

HB THEOPHILOS III REMARKS AT THE INTERFAITH CLIMATE AND ENERGY CONFERENCE.

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Remarks at the Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference

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at the Konrad Adenauer Event Center

Mishkenot Sha'ananim.

Rabbi Neril,

Distinguished Fellow Panelists,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for this opportunity, to make a few remarks to this Conference and to participate in this panel. The subject of climate and energy is a vast and crucial one for our time, our region, and our world. All thoughtful people are concerned about the integrity of the environment and the careful human stewardship of our natural resources. The earth is the common home of all humanity, and we have a moral responsibility to ensure that all humanity is able to share our earthly home. As the prophet David says in the Psalms, *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it"*, (Ps.24:1).

There is in the Christian tradition a profound understanding of the goodness of creation, and the central place of creation in the sacred story of salvation. Not only do we read in the Book of Genesis that *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good"*, (Gen, 1:31). Christians also affirm that God, the Eternal Logos, took on our flesh in Jesus Christ

precisely to make holy this creaturely life and to show us that, as those made in the image and likeness of God, we may attain to union with God himself. This pilgrimage to union with God, this theosis, begins in this life, set in the midst of creation, of which we human beings are a part.

In the Christian understanding, on the one hand creation groans with the birth pangs of the world to come. What is to be, the fulfillment of all things in their original purpose, is not yet. As Saint Paul says in the Letter to the Romans, *"we know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now"*, (Rom. 8:22). This is born out in our human experience, for, as we read in the First Letter of John, *"Beloved, we are God's children now: what we will be has not yet been revealed"*, (Jn. 3:2).

And yet on the other hand, creation is also jubilant. We read in The Song of the Three Young Men in the Book of Daniel a great hymn of creation, and how the creation itself -the cosmic order, the earth and its creatures, as well as human beings- glorifies the Creator:

"Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord;

Sing, praise to Him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all you winds;

Sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Let the earth bless the Lord;

Let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord all that grows in the ground...seas and rivers, springs...and all animals", (Dan. 3:57 and passim).

This is an understanding of creation that is not a means to an end. but part of the essential life that God brought into being out of nothing.

In the Holy Tradition of the Church, too, we see a reverence for creation, and a celebration of the intimate relationship between creation and the Creator.

For example from the Church Fathers we read this passage from Saint Basil's reflections on the Book of Genesis:

"In the beginning God created." What a glorious order! He first establishes a beginning, so that it might not be supposed that the world never had a beginning. Then he adds "created" to show that which was made was a very small part of the power of the Creator. In the same way that the potter, after having made with equal pains a great number of vessels, has not exhausted either his art or his talent; thus the Maker of the Universe, whose creative power, far from being bounded by one world, could extend to the infinite, needed only the impulse of His will to bring the immensities of the visible world into being. If then the world has a beginning, and if it has been created, enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was the Creator". (The Hexaemeron, Homily 1 .2).

For the Church Fathers, there was a clear understanding of the wonder of creation, as well as of reverence for the Creator of all.

And In the Service for the Great Blessing of the Waters on the Feast of the Theophany -the Baptism of the Lord in the River Jordan- we read these words written by our great predecessor. Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem:

"Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters. Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord. Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour. Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for humankind. Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the

laying on of hands by his own creature. Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear seeing God's condescension towards us. Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord, Today all creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the fallings of humankind are being washed away by the waters of Jordan. Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us. Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord".

The entire liturgical tradition of the Church rings with the imagery of creation, and uses such imagery to underscore the message of salvation.

However, what is also crystal clear in the Christian tradition is the distinction between the Creator and the creation. The opening chapters of the Book of Genesis underscore this point, as does the great so-called Prologue of the Gospel of Saint John, where he writes:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Cod, and the Word was Cod. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came Into being", (John,1:1,3).

We read also in the Psalms the Important verses in Psalm 101:

*"Long ago, (O, God), you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

They will perish, but you will endure;

they will all wear out tike a garment.

You change them like clothing,

and they pass away;

but you are the same,

and your years have no end". (P5 101: 25-27).

Respect for creation and effective sustainability depend on the necessary differentiation that we must make between Creator and the creation. They are not the same. And in our concern to ensure the stewardship of the creation and the proper and just use of our natural resources, we function in a kind of priesthood. Priests live on the border. This does not mean that we must be distant. On the contrary this implies a deep and divine intimacy, and we respond to this intimacy as to a commandment.

The care of the environment begins with our own purification and stillness. How many deserts have been turned into both spiritual and physical oases, where in the restored relationship between human beings and creation we see the harmony that we are seeking, in this respect, our proper treatment of the environment, which means harmony with creation, is also a reflection of our equally necessary commitment to the harmony of the human community.

Thank you.

His Beatitude,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem