

MESSAGE OF HIS ALL HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW TO THE ICSD

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

To the Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference Of The
Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (Jerusalem,
March 2012)

“Dear friends, beloved conference participants,

It is a joy and privilege to address you from the venerable
See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as you assemble for the
Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference.

For the Orthodox Christian Church, the protection of the
environment as God’s creation is the supreme responsibility of
human beings, quite apart from any material or other financial
benefits that it may bring, in the Book of Genesis, we are
told that God gave the gift of this “very beautiful” world to
humanity together with the commandment to “serve and preserve”
it. There is an intimate relationship between the Creator and
the creation. Our understanding of salvation is not other-
worldly, but involves the transfiguration of this world. The
natural environment cannot be separated from personal piety
and spirituality.

This means that environmental awareness and sustainable
development constitute a profoundly moral and spiritual
problem. To persist in the current path of ecological
destruction is not only foolish. It is suicidal and – as we
have repeatedly emphasized – sinful. It is an act of arrogance
against God and defiance against nature.

Indeed, the care for and protection of Creation constitutes the responsibility of everyone on an individual and collective level. Moreover, the political authorities of each nation have a greater responsibility to evaluate the situation in order to propose actions and legislate measures.

This is why, over the last two decades, the Orthodox Church has prayed throughout the world for the protection and preservation of the natural environment.

More specifically, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has organized eight interfaith and interdisciplinary ecological symposia throughout the world -including the Mediterranean Sea, the Arctic Ocean, and the Mississippi River -to gather scientists and theologians, politicians and policy makers, business leaders and NGOs, as well as activists and journalists, to explore the impact of our actions on the waters of the world.

We must recognize the inseparable connection between ecology and economy, between global poverty and environmental pollution. Conservation and compassion are interdependent. The web of life is a sacred gift of God -ever so precious and ever so delicate. We must serve our neighbor and preserve our world with humility and generosity, in a spirit, of simplicity and solidarity. The footprint that we leave on our world must be lighter, much lighter.

Faith communities must first put their own houses in order. Therefore, on a more practical and pastoral level, we have reached out to our parishes throughout the world in order to inspire and assist them to become "greener" as communities and individuals. In local parishes, we have developed educational resources and are urging our faithful to learn to sacrifice and live with less instead of more. This is the balance that we require if we are going to acquire a new way of living.

Let us remember that, whoever we are, we all have our part to play, our sacred responsibility to the future, it is not too

late to heal – as a people and as a planet. We can steer the earth toward our children’s future. But we cannot afford to wait or to waste time. We must act now”.