



BARTHOLOMEW 1ST

Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Mr President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy

Mr President of the French Republic, François Hollande

Mr President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara

Your Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco

Mr President of the World Policy Conference, Thierry de Montbrial

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Esteemed participants,

Dear friends,

If there is one certainty that our era can offer us, it is that it will provide plenty of material for the historians of the future. They will be able to draw parallels with the first globalisation which led to the internecine wars of the 20th century, or with the turn of the 17th century which, with the end of the religious wars, was marked by the start of Europe's rise to power. In any case, there is a good chance that the future historiography will view our period as a collapse.

The confusion which prevails today supports this hypothesis. The subjects to be discussed at the conference over the next few days are therefore questions rather than answers, doubts rather than certainties.

Twenty years after the collapse of the communist system, the economic crisis has shattered any certainties about the self-regulating capacity of the capitalist system. Economic governance seems therefore to be a necessity. That said, it is hard to see how global economic governance can be implemented without political power at the same level. The unification of humanity, that eternal ideal, seems ever more distant today, when the major global equilibriums are being redrawn, when conflicts and tensions are increasing and when a fragmented, multipolar world is emerging.

In this context, old alliances which seemed so solid just a few years ago are beginning to weaken. Europe and America seem to be on diverging paths. The European Union itself is in deep crisis. Incapable of guaranteeing its citizens a privileged place among the societies of the world, it is witnessing its materialist cement crumble, which only makes its spiritual deficit more visible.

To the east, tensions are growing in the Middle East, site of one of the cradles of Western civilisation. The region is one of the major geopolitical challenges of our time. The descent into hell of the guardian of a large part of the history of our civilisation is resulting in the destruction of some of the deepest roots of the European experience.



On another, more global, matter, the concerns that have been felt for several years about the environment are on the increase. The economic crisis monopolises attention by turning it to the short term and diverting it from medium- or long-term concerns. And yet it is primarily on these two time-scales that these questions can be asked.

So what can guide us through these storms? Undoubtedly, a sense of history, the ability to discern the different, intersecting cycles to which our daily lives belong.

That said, a purely intellectual approach will be insufficient. Historical knowledge must be part of a broader theme, concerning many. It must be open to the collective memory. In these times of transition and collapse, the collective memory is an essential resource. And yet, for the past century, humanity has destroyed memorial resources more quickly than natural resources. Consider, for example, the geography of populations in the Eastern Mediterranean as it is today and according to the accounts of barely a century ago. The religious and linguistic complexity which characterised it, the mosaic of peoples, the diversity of landscapes, all of that has been eroded - and with it the memory of the succession of States, migrations and invasions, the splendour of civilisations, the tragedies of a turbulent history. This memory that can still be found here and there, in the monuments of cities or in local storytelling, was and still is a living school of collective behaviour in the face of the vagaries of geoeconomics, geopolitics and geostrategy. It is vital that we protect it. In these deep wells of collective memory, religions play a fundamental role. In addition to the long historic line to which they belong, religions have the considerable advantage of being intended for everyone, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, urban or rural.

Among the major religious institutions, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople occupies, due to its history, a unique position. Through the enormous, and often traumatic, upheavals that it has had to contend with over the course of two millennia, our Patriarch has always been active, proof, if any were required, that it is possible to survive and to provide an account of civilisation down the ages. By its very existence, our Institution contributes to giving meaning and hope to today's anguished world as it tries to find its way. Consequently, we think that all governance must take into consideration the complexity of the world, by giving it back the tools needed to protect its pluralism. First among these tools is dialogue, which is the only one likely to curb the phenomenon of fragmentation which we are faced with. We therefore put ourselves forward as participants in this dialogue in order to facilitate meetings, discussions and sharing of collective memories. The basic principle of all good governance is not so far from the words of Christ, who said: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7, 12).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By inviting us to explore these ideas in depth at the opening session, the organisers of the World Policy Conference have highlighted the fundamental importance of collective memory when considering global political affairs or, in other words, ecumenical issues. The Ecumenical Patriarch thanks them, and wishes them the utmost success in their undertaking.