



# BARTHOLOMEW 1ST

## Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Allow me to introduce our discussions with a quotation: "The world in which we live today needs the values of religion, steeped in the virtues with which we must arm ourselves to come into the good graces of Our Creator, God Almighty, and which strengthen in us the propensity for tolerance, love and cooperation bearing the seal of human charity and piety."

We owe these words to His Majesty, King Mohammed VI, Amir Al-Mouminine, known to the world for his openness, wisdom and desire to build bridges across the Mediterranean, while courageously and determinedly fighting religious fundamentalism. That fundamentalism feeds not only on disenchantment with the world, the failings of "happy modernity," and opposition to globalisation. Religious identity has transformed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its manipulation, if not its instrumentalisation for hegemonic purposes, has twisted the very nature of its vocation: to help bring about peace, reconciliation and dialogue.

The international scene is in the throes of profound change. Identitarian conflicts are combining with the rise of social injustices. Concurrent to this, the perception of inequalities is growing. In this context of insecurity, religion can play a positive role, provided that it becomes capable of taking back ownership of the nature of its message. A message misappropriated. A message violated. A message ensnared in the warmongering of fundamentalism. While it is true that there are many misunderstandings about religious fundamentalism out there, religion has without a doubt been used as a means for political ends or for personal interests that are inherently contradictory to it.

We must therefore note the imperative need for dialogue in order to respond to contemporary conflicts, beyond the religious or non-religious nature of these conflicts. Dialogue is not a negotiation. Nor is it a controversy. There are no winners or losers in it. It is a characteristic of each being, through which the relational quality of the human being is formed. To understand what is happening in our world today, we need to think about the role of religion in humanity. What some call "the return of religion" in a "post-secular" world is, in fact, the reactivation of an essential dimension of humanity, which, even though it is powerfully linked to identity, is not necessarily identity-based but metaphysical and spiritual.

In this sense, though the functions of religion may seem obvious to us, they are no less crucial for the existence and co-existence of human beings: a. Religion ties in with the concerns of each human being and helps us develop answers to existential questions about life, the meaning of life, truth and eternity. b. Religion is connected with the identity of peoples and civilisations. It is for this reason that we must not only know and recognise the religious traditions of others, but also appreciate them. This knowledge is a prerequisite for dialogue. c. Religion has contributed to enabling humanity's major cultural and civilisational ventures. d. Lastly, religion is an essential factor in the peace process. As Saint Paul wrote: "For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace." (1 Co 14, 33)

This is also what the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, in June 2016, reiterated regarding the importance of interreligious dialogue: "Frank inter-religious dialogue contributes to the development of mutual trust in promoting peace and reconciliation. The Church is fighting to make the 'peace from on high' more tangible on earth. True peace is not achieved by the force of weapons, but only by love that 'is not self-seeking' (1 Co 13, 5). The balm of faith must be used to cover over and heal others' old wounds and not to stir new hatred." (Prov. 17)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Morocco has been a fore-runner in interreligious dialogue, at the head of the fight against fundamentalism. As you know, the Mediterranean Basin experienced in centuries past peaceful coexistence between Jews, Christians and



Muslims. This experience clearly demonstrates, should it still need to be demonstrated today, that believers of different religious traditions can live together around a common project: the unity of humanity and peace.

Among the major religious institutions, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has a unique place, through its history. Throughout the profound and often traumatic upheavals that it has had to face in two millennia, our Patriarchate has always been able to remain active, proving beyond doubt that it is possible to survive and pass on a testimonial of civilisation through the ages. By its sheer existence, the Orthodox Church helps to give meaning and hope to a frightened world, which is now seeking its way.

The legitimacy of religions today depends on their ability to assert a clear stance on the protection of human freedom and dignity as founding principles in building peace. No challenge, whether personal or international, will find resolution in solitude and isolation. We need one another, because we are relational beings, communitarian beings who, as we move closer together, become true contributors to peace.

We can only rejoice in the fact that, in this country, a new edition of the *World Policy Conference* is taking place. By inviting us to express these few thoughts at the opening session, its organizers –and here we would like to warmly thank Professor Thierry de Montbrial for his friendship –stressed the fundamental importance of religion in reflecting on world affairs, or, to phrase it otherwise, about international issues. The Ecumenical Patriarchate which we have the honour of representing thanks them, while wishing them every success in their undertakings.