



HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I

Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

The rise of populism around the world is alarming. An ideology without substance, a politics of pandering and partisanship, it is nothing but the cynical taking up of a timeworn concept in international relations: “divide and conquer”. But this diagnosis of contemporary society also attests to the malaise and anxiety of the human being. In the wake of the various political, industrial, economic and technological revolutions that have succeeded each other since the 18th century, globalisation, the fruit of modernity, was supposed to usher in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world. Global interdependence was expected to bring about more equality, freedom and even democracy. But by using the failures of globalisation as a scapegoat, populism fuels hatred of others.

Unfortunately, in this whirlwind of excess and violence, religion is often used for disruptive and divisive purposes, pitting people against each other to the point where dialogue is no longer possible. According to its two usual meanings, religion is by nature unifying, bringing Heaven and Earth closer together, and acts horizontally as a vector of reconciliation. Faith is at the crossroads of the encounter between the divine and the human. As the June 2016 Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church recalls, “True peace is not achieved by force of arms, but only through love that ‘does not seek its own’ (1 Cor. 13.5). The oil of faith must be used to soothe and heal the wounds of others, not to rekindle new fires of hatred.”

The very concept of relationship is in jeopardy. Like a swinging pendulum, the transformation of the world into a simple village has generated, for very diverse reasons, its negative double: isolation. What happens on a personal level also happens on an international one. Isolation is both personal and geopolitical. Thinkers, such as philosopher Régis Debray, have pondered the issue of connection as medium. Christian theologians prefer to speak in terms of communion, by thinking simultaneously of the One and the Multiple embodied in the Trinitarian typology. The One is never isolated and “multiple” does not mean “fragmented”. The One and the Multiple coexist. They are not an oxymoron but actually represent the expression of a promise. Communion flows from their relationship with each other. So does peace. We are certain that religion must play a positive role as an antidote to the poison of xenophobia concentrated by the migratory crisis today.

This social debate, which is especially lively in Europe, involves many aspects not just of our identity, but also of our faith, a faith lived in the reality of its incarnation. In 2016, we met our brother His Holiness Pope Francis on the Greek island of Lesbos, particularly exposed to the flow of migrants seeking refuge from the other side of the Mediterranean. On that occasion, we were able to get a sense of the dual tragedy unfolding before our eyes. It is dual because the migrants’ voyage is not only dangerous and hellish, with no assurance of success, but also because of the effects mentioned above, especially populism.

The crisis of connection and relationships is also highly visible on the environmental front. For isn’t the great migratory challenge of tomorrow connected to climate change? Scientists believe that in the coming years, climate change will affect the poorest people the most. That is why the environmental problem of pollution is directly linked to the social problem of poverty. In the final analysis, all environmental activities are measured through the prism of their impact and effects on the most vulnerable.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently published an alarming report on the possibility that the planet will become 1.5 degree warmer by 2030. Global warming is gathering pace and its consequences are already being felt. Protecting the environment is not just a scientific matter. It is an international political and geopolitical issue upon which peace depends. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been aware of the urgency of the situation for around 30 years. Our reckless consumption of natural resources such as oil, water and forests threatens our planet’s climate. That is the disastrous outcome of industrialisation and overconsumption on our



environment. To restore our planet's balance, we need a spirituality that fosters humility and respect and is aware of our acts' effects on creation.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

The idea of sacrifice, for the self and for others, of the self or of others, bears witness to the intimate relationship between the sacred and religion. At a time when our world glorifies profit and success, religion must be recognised, without cynicism but with a spirit of responsibility, as a cultural ferment of civilisation that nurtures a genuine desire for reconciliation. For there is no point in our reconciling the divine and the human if humanity is not reconciled with itself and with creation at the same time. Not just theology, but also art, literature and philosophy have always depicted and interpreted war, conflict and hatred as the relentless repetition of the original expulsion from Eden. Thus, confident in the power of reconciliation, Orthodox liturgy prays for world peace. Christianity is probably not the only religion to do so. Resonating in complex harmony, the voice of religions calls for the end of conflict, the peaceful coexistence of peoples and the restoration of the bonds of brotherhood.

We can only rejoice that this new edition of the World Policy Conference is taking place, in Morocco. By inviting us to share our ideas, its organisers—and here we wish to thank Professor Thierry de Montbrial very warmly for his friendship—have underscored the crucial importance religion can have in thinking about world affairs and international issues. The Ecumenical Patriarchate that we have the honour to represent thanks them while wishing them, and all the participants, total success in their endeavour.