



THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

GREETING

By His All-Holiness

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

To the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy

(Paris, June 21-24, 2011)

It is with great joy that we greet the members of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy gathering in Paris this month. Although we cannot be present among you in person, we are surely with you in thought and prayer, especially through our representative, His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France. We convey our Patriarchal blessing on all those involved in this auspicious occasion, from the tireless organizers to the impressive array of speakers and the distinguished participants.

The subject of your attention and discussion is critical for our time inasmuch as it touches on fundamental principles of human life and community, namely the significance of “religious values” and their impact on the “reality of the economic crisis” that challenges the whole world.

Therefore, our common agenda must first of all be reflected by mutual respect of each other’s traditions and an appreciation of each other’s aspirations. With God’s help and our own commitment, we must address the issues of global economy, social justice, and religious principles. For all who

struggle to make their “daily bread” in the context of free and legitimate enterprise, as well as within the reality of increasing immigration, we must endeavor to expand economic opportunities that enrich lives with the nobility of labor. The curse of unemployment and poverty must be confronted without compromise. And we must also be concerned for a healthy environment in our neighborhoods and for the entire planet.

From our vantage point at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which rests on the cusp of Europe and Asia, we have a perspective that may prove helpful in these considerations. There has been an increasing tendency in political discourse to speak of a “clash of civilizations,” as the frontiers between the Muslim and Christian worlds begin to dissolve before global political and economic forces. Indeed, the fall of the “iron curtain” and the rise of peoples seeking self-determination have energized the religious sensibilities of entire peoples. Nationalist ideals converge with religious zeal and cultural pride, creating unexpected and unprecedented geo-political tides.

We must, therefore, ask: What is the nature of the problems that face Europe and the world? Are the solutions to be found in narrow economic and political categories formulated in the past by the West? Have we not been taught that “man does not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4.4)? In this regard, we are convinced that working economies are only *partial* solutions. You understand the onerous task of revitalizing economic infrastructures emaciated by failed social policies. But what of decimated cultures? What of religious institutions abused by secular powers for generations? The broader question is: How are we to rebuild the soul of our nations?

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, as a transnational and spiritual force, has sought to assist in the reconstruction of the moral, ethical, religious and social fabric that was torn asunder by decades of atheistic totalitarian

regimes. In Albania, for instance, we have nurtured the revitalization of the Albanian Orthodox Church, which was thoroughly destroyed by the communist government. We have advocated for the inclusion of newly freed countries, mostly Orthodox Christian nations, in the emerging political and economic matrix of Europe. We have assumed a proactive role in the dialogue of understanding between the Muslim and Christian worlds.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is poised on the frontier between these two religions. Our unique position in history and geography affords us a panoramic view of risks and possibilities. Our experience has taught us that “all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8.28). If the world is to be culturally and spiritually rebuilt, then this must happen with a spirit of love, and not with a demon of fear; it will occur by means of a spirit of understanding and appreciation of the qualities of “otherness,” and not by ignorance.

Closely related to the reality of the economic crisis are two corollary issues, namely the problem of unemployment and the challenge of the natural environment. Unemployment literally plagues societies throughout the world. It is abundantly clear that neither the moral counsel of religious leaders nor fragmented measures by socio-economic strategists or political policymakers could be sufficient to curb this growing tragedy. The problem of unemployment compels us to re-examine the priorities of affluent societies in the West, and especially the unrestricted advance of development, which is considered only in economic terms.

By the same token, the ecological crisis obliges us to comprehend how we are trapped in the tyrannical cycle created by a need for constant productivity, by rises and increases in the supply of consumer goods. Thus, the economy assumes a life of its own, a vicious cycle that becomes

independent of human need or human concern. What is needed is a radical change in politics and economics, a change that underlines the unique and primary value of the human person, thereby *placing a human face on the concepts of economy and employment as well as productivity and pollution*. And in the effort to make this change, people in Western societies – as well as those that proclaim “Western” principles – ought to assume greater personal responsibility than their poorer brothers and sisters.

We wish all of you the guidance of the grace of God in your deliberations for the benefit of your respective nations, the continent of Europe, and the whole world.