

11. A Message from the Eastern Orthodox Church

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Distinguished organizers and esteemed participants, it is truly a privilege to address you from a distance on the vital subject of Plastic Pollution that you are discussing at Boston College on October 4–5, 2024. During your conference, entitled “Joining Science and Theology to End Plastic Pollution, Protect Health, and Advance Social Justice,” you will consider numerous aspects of this challenge, including the critical relationship between science and religion in our age, as well as the urgent need to advance public health and social justice in our world.

For more than thirty years, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has underlined the imperative to preserve the natural environment, protecting its resources from destructive and detrimental chemical materials. We have also emphasized that we can only hope to resolve or expect to restrain the climate crisis with the collective and collaborative effort of all academic disciplines and social domains.

Above all, we have highlighted the intimate and essential relationship between what goes on around us and what goes on inside us. Because the way we perceive creation is the way that we will inevitably handle creation. If we appreciate our world as something ephemeral and expedient, then we will naturally treat it as something marketable and profitable. But if we approach our world as something invaluable and spiritual—that is to say, as something that we received as a gift from above and from our ancestors, but also as something we should refer to God in thanksgiving while handing down to our children in love—then we will invariably respect it as something far greater than us and our interests.

Dear friends, beyond the awareness that we must radically change our attitude and behavior, what has changed in recent years is the reaction of nature itself to our careless actions and insensitive behaviors. We have learned that not only are we inseparably interconnected as human beings,

but also that what happens outside us is integrally related to what exists inside us. Not only have we polluted our oceans and our waters with plastic, but we have even compromised our health and jeopardized our brothers and sisters. Plastics no longer merely surround us; they permeate our body, pervade our population, and penetrate our planet. What we desperately need is not just cleaner products or more sustainable packaging. We need a new worldview and a new way of living. Limiting single-use plastics and avoiding over-production of plastics are important steps along a journey that leads back to the heart and its choices.

I wish you every blessing and success in your work.



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians. He has been the Patriarch of Constantinople since 1991.