

Press release – Thessaloniki – 7 September 2016

A turning point in the Ecumenical effort for Integral Ecology

A very important transdisciplinary conference took place at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), September 2 & 3 under the title « Integral Ecology as a new road to Reconciliation». In a significant way the gathering took place under the triple patronage of the Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and the Archbishop Canterbury, Justin Welby. Messages of the two first were delivered by special messengers whereas the leader of the Anglican Church was present by teleconferencing.

Around 50 people from 15 countries from around the world took part in the conference, lay people as well members of the clergy: engineers, architects, sociologists, political scientists, lawyers, economists and theologians among others. The organisers were AIESC (International Association for Christian Social Teaching - www.aiesc.net), the SRCRC (Social Research Centre for Religion and Culture – University of Aristotle) and the CEMES (Centre for Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies, www.cemes.weebly.com), with the support of Renovabis and of the Aristotle University.

The discussions were nourished at the same time by the Encyclical Letter « Laudato Si »¹ and by the «The Witness of the Church in Today's World »² adopted by the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, in June 2016, as well as by the contributions of the various fields. The emphasis was put on the fact that ecological problems cannot be solved in isolation. Paul Dembinski – the president of AIESC – insisted that in our quest for integral ecology we ought to go « beyond ecology », and the rev. Professor Chrysostom Nassis, from Aristotle University, added that we have even to go « beyond slogans ». Prof. Christos Tsironis considers Integral Ecology as « a dynamic and multifaceted answer, full of compassion and responsibility, to the dramatic calling of the Earth and of the poor ». Prof. Petros Vassiliadis insisted that we have to go beyond human rights in respect to the environment, and address also human responsibilities. The Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Aristotle University, Professor Miltiadis Konstantinou concludes that : « radical change of the social structures is necessary. We need to fight against the consumerist lifestyle and be active at the very heart of our society».

The significance of this ecological involvement of all Christian is invaluable. The possibility is rising that where the politicians have failed in this world in crisis, the Christians may give an effective inspiration, at the local and global level. To this goal, we can rely on the Orthodox principle of « reconciliation » (of man with the Other, with the Creation and with God) as well as on the will to build the « Civilisation of Love » - so dear to Paul VI and Saint

¹http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

² <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>

John-Paul That is to say of the civilisation of respect for the dignity of the human person, in all areas, including his eschatological vocation.

After Thessaloniki, we may only wish that the inspiration from the Christian Churches, carried above all by lay professionals, may be in the near future shared and extended other religions. As we can see, this historic Thessaloniki conference is indeed above all a powerful call of hope.

The Conference also adopted an urgent call for a universal ceasefire on September 20, date of the World Day of Prayer for Peace and of the Assisi meeting of the world religious leaders.



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