

Address of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW - “Oceans of Hope” Environmental Tribute to the “Green” Patriarch On the International Coastal Cleanup Day



[The Avram Theater at Stony Brook University Southampton, New York - September 20, 2025]

President of Stony Brook University, Andrea Goldsmith,

Chairman of Stony Brook Council, Kevin Law,

Your Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America,

Most Reverend Metropolitans and Right Reverend Bishops,

Dear Students and Faculty of Stony Brook University and

Friends of this Remarkable Community of the Hamptons,

On this day, when we observe International Coastal Cleanup Day, we give thanks to God for the opportunity to be here on Long Island with you at Stony Brook University. Earlier today, we toured the remarkable Southampton Marine Sciences Center of the University, where the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science works tirelessly for policies and initiatives to preserve our planet's most valuable resource – our oceans and seas.

We also had the opportunity to sail in the estuary known as Shinnecock Bay, and to observe for ourselves the glory of this amazing ecological system.

As Ecumenical Patriarch, leading the worldwide Orthodox Church through canonical tradition and conciliar ministry, we have stressed for decades the need to address the growing environmental challenges that face the human family. For, it is only in the last two hundred years – and almost exclusively because of the “Industrial Revolution” – that the pollution of our Mother Earth – Her air, land, and water – has arisen in our existence.

Thus, even before our election to the Ecumenical Throne, as a Hierarch of the Mother Church of Constantinople, we have labored for half a century to raise the awareness of everyone – from Heads of State and Governmental Leaders; from Academia and the Scientific communities, to the entire interspiritual landscape, both within the Christian Family and throughout the Interfaith world – all the way to the People in the Pews, as you say, who might not understand at first, that the stewardship of creation is as much a part of their spiritual vocation as is their participation in Sunday Services.

As we were born and raised on the Island of Imvros, called Gökçeada in Turkish (which means “Heavenly Island,”) we feel at home here on Long Island.

We have a long experience of working to preserve and protect the shoreline of our own Island and we have addressed concerns with the world’s wondrous sources of water for decades, sponsoring symposia around the globe.

We convened our first Symposium, Revelation and the Environment, thirty years ago this month, joining with the late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on the sacred Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. This was to commemorate the Nineteen Hundredth anniversary of the writing of the Book of Revelation, which speaks of the

waters of the seas ‘becoming like blood and every creature in the sea dying.’ [1]

Our second Symposium, The Black Sea in Crisis, was held two years later, together with His Excellency Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission. This symposium undertook a concrete case study, visiting the countries that surround the Black Sea and engaging in conversation with local religious leaders and environmental activists, as well as regional scientists and politicians.

A direct result of this symposium, the Halki Ecological Institute, was organized in June 1999 to promote wider regional collaboration and education among clergy and theologians, educators and students, as well as scientists and journalists.

This initiative marked a new direction in inter-disciplinary vision and dialogue, implementing the ecological theory of the Religious and Scientific Committee into practice.

The Third Symposium, River of Life – Down the Danube to the Black Sea, was held in October 1999, with the joint auspices of His Excellency Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. Participants traveled the length of the Danube River, from Germany to the Ukraine and to Romania in the aftermath of the military and ethnic conflict in the Former Yugoslavia.

The Fourth Symposium, The Adriatic Sea – a Sea at Risk, a Unity of Purpose, addressed the ethical aspects of the environmental crisis. Held in June 2002, under the joint auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarch and again His Excellency Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, this symposium opened in Durres, Albania, and concluded in Venice, Italy, where we co-signed the ‘Venice Declaration’ of environmental ethics with the late Pope John Paul II via satellite link-up.

The Fifth Symposium, The Baltic Sea - A Common Heritage, A Shared Responsibility, was organized the next year. This Symposium also resulted in the North Sea Conference, co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Norway.

The Sixth Symposium, The Amazon: Source of Life, was held in July 2006 on the Amazon River together with the patronage of His Excellency Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations. This symposium concentrated on the global dimension of problems stemming directly from the Amazon.

The Seventh Symposium, The Arctic – Mirror of Life, was held in the fall of 2007, directing its attention to the Arctic Sea. The Symposium considered the plight of

indigenous populations, the fragility of the sea ice, and the encroachment of oil exploration in a region considered to be one of the first victims of human-induced climate change.

The Eighth Symposium, The Great Mississippi River: Restoring Balance, was held in October 2009. Of the world's greatest rivers, the Mississippi is among those which has fallen most completely under human domination, rife with domestic and industrial waste for nearly two centuries.

Each of these Symposia brought together diverse participants to explore how we meet the challenges that the modern industrial era has forced upon the planet and humankind.

Today's celebration is entitled, "Oceans of Hope," and there is still reason to be hopeful about the future. Our world is over seventy percent water, and the oceans contain over ninety-five percent of that water.

A newborn-child is around seventy-five percent water, which decreases as we age. Water is our source of life and well-being and events such as this International Coastal Cleanup Day can help to focus us to address the pressing needs of our day.

Well before the industrial age that wrought the pollution we fight against today - over twenty-four hundred years ago, the great playwright Euripides wrote:

Θάλασσα κλύζει πάντα τάνθρωπων κακά.

The sea washes away all mankind's evils. [2]

Perhaps that was true then, but the sea, the oceans, the rivers, and streams now need our help. Here at Stony Brook, you are making most significant contributions to the healing of our waters that they so desperately need.

We are honored by your bestowal of the University Medal to our humble person, as a sign of the solidarity we share in the protection of the environment. Let us never wane in our efforts, for every drop of water is a precious gift of God.

Thank you.

[1] Cf. Revelation 16:3.

[2] Euripides, Iphigenia in Tauris, 1193.



























