

The 'Green' Patriarch

Maureen Fiedler | Nov. 2, 2009 NCR Today

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I is visiting the United States. This Greek Orthodox prelate is often called the 'Green' Patriarch. And his visit resurrects pleasant memories for me.

Last year, I met him when I visited Turkey on an interfaith tour. Now, being a feminist, I am not usually impressed by patriarchs of any stripe. But I must confess, I was pleasantly surprised by Bartholomew.

I met him in Istanbul when our small group visited the headquarters of the Orthodox Church. Initially, it felt like we were stepping into the 15th century. We sat along the sides of a long 'throne room,' waiting for the Patriarch to appear. An officious young priest was scurrying around in his cassock. When Bartholomew finally arrived, he wore black robes and the 'hat and veil' (I don't know the proper term) that Orthodox leaders commonly wear.

I did not know his reputation then, and so I expected a pious sermon on Orthodox-Islamic relations, or spiritual generalities. But he spent the entire time with us talking about climate change, and the moral responsibility of religious leaders to address that issue 'urgently. Here was a man with a 21st century moral vision, supported quite obviously by strong scientific knowledge.

I am delighted that Fordham University gave him an honorary degree, and I hope that our Roman Catholic hierarchy will take note of his message, and begin to address the issue of climate change as an urgent challenge. If they (and we) are truly concerned about human life, we need to speak out forcefully and dramatically about the peril our planet faces.

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