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+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To All the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Peace and Mercy from the Maker of All Creation

Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

Dearest brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

With the goodness and grace of the all-bountiful God, today marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the Holy Great Church of Christ established the feast of Indiction and first day of the ecclesiastical year as “the day of environmental protection.” We did not only address our Orthodox faithful, nor again just Christian believer or even representatives of other religions, but also political leaders, environmentalists and other scientists, as well as intellectuals and all people of good will, seeking their contribution.

The ecological activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate served as the inspiration for theology to advance prominently the truth of Christian anthropology and cosmology, the Eucharistic worldview and treatment of creation, along with the spirit of Orthodox asceticism as the basis for understanding the reason for and response to the ecological crisis. The bibliography related to theological ecology or ecological theology is extensive and on the whole constitutes an admirable Orthodox witness before the major challenges of contemporary humanity and earthly life. Concern for the ecological crisis and for the global dimensions and consequences of sin – of this alienating internal “reversal of values” in humankind – brought to the surface the connection between ecological and social issues as well as for the need to address them jointly. Mobilizing forces for the protection of

the integrity of creation and for social justice are interconnected and inseparable actions.

The interest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the protection of creation did not arise as a reaction to or as a result of the contemporary ecological crisis. The latter was simply the motivation and occasion for the Church to express, develop, proclaim and promote its environmentally-friendly principles. The foundation of the Church's undiminished concern for the natural environment lies in its ecclesiological identity and theology. Respect and care for creation are a dimension of our faith, the content of our life in the Church and as the Church. The very life of the Church is "an experienced ecology," an applied respect and care for creation, and the source of its environmental activities. In essence, the interest of the Church for the protection of the environment is the extension of the Holy Eucharist in all dimensions of its relationship to the world. The liturgical life of the Church, the ascetic ethos, pastoral service and experience of the cross and resurrection by the faithful, the unquenchable desire for eternity: all of these comprise a communion of persons for which the natural reality cannot be reduced to an object or useful matter to meet the needs of an individual or humanity; by contrast, this reality is considered as an act, deed the handiwork of a personal God, who calls us to respect and protect it, thereby rendering us His "coworkers," "stewards," "guardians," and "priests" of creation in order to cultivate a Eucharistic relationship with it.

Care for the natural environment is not an added activity, but an essential expression of church life. It does not have a secular, but rather a purely ecclesiastical character. It is a "liturgical ministry." All of the initiatives and activities of the Church are "applied ecclesiology." In this sense, theological ecology does not merely refer to the development of an ecological awareness or the response to ecological problems on the basis of the principles of Christian anthropology and cosmology. On the contrary, it involves the renewal of the whole

creation in Christ, just as this is realized and experienced in the Holy Eucharist, which is an image and foretaste of the eschatological fullness of the Divine Economy in the doxological wholeness and luminous splendor of the heavenly kingdom.

Most honorable brothers and most precious children in the Lord,

The ecological crisis reveals that our world comprises an integral whole, that our problems are global and shared. In order to meet these challenges, we require a multilayered mobilization, a common accord, direction and action. It is inconceivable for humankind to recognize the severity of the problem and yet continue to behave in oblivion. While in recent decades the dominant model of economic development in the context of globalization – highlighting the fetishism of financial markers and magnification of financial profit – has exacerbated ecological and economic problems, the notion still prevails widely that “there is no other alternative” and that not conforming to the rigid validity logic of the world’s economy will lead to unbridled social and financial situations. Thus, any alternative forms of development, along with the power of social solidarity and justice, are overlooked and undermined.

For our part, however, we are obliged to assume greater measures for the application of the ecological and social consequences of our faith. It is extremely vital that our archdioceses and metropolises, as well as many of our parishes and sacred monasteries, have fostered initiatives and activities for the protection of the environment, but also various programs of ecological education. We should pay special attention to the Christian formation of our youth, so that it may function as an area of cultivation and development of an ecological ethos and solidarity. Childhood and adolescence are particularly susceptible life phases for ecological and social responsiveness. Aware of the urgency of environmental education, the

Ecumenical Patriarchate devoted the Third in its series of international Halki Summits to the subject of “Theological Education and Ecological Awareness” (Istanbul, May 31<sup>st</sup> to June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019) with a view to incorporating ecology and environmental awareness into programs and curricula of theological schools and seminaries. The solution to the great challenges of our world is unattainable without spiritual orientation.

In conclusion, then, we wish all of you a favorable and blessed ecclesiastical year, filled with works pleasing to God. We invite the radiant children of the Mother Church throughout the world to pray for the integrity of creation, to be sustainable and charitable in every aspect of their lives, to strive for the protection of the natural environment, as well as the promotion of peace and justice. And we proclaim once more the truth that there can be no genuine progress, when the “very good” creation and the human person made in the image and likeness of God suffer. Finally, through the intercession of the first-among-the-saints Theotokos Pammakaristos, we invoke upon you the life-giving grace and boundless mercy of the Creator and Provider of all.

September 1, 2019

+Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent supplicant before God