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Prot. No. 851

+ BARTHOLOMEW
By God's Mercy
Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church Grace, Peace and Mercy
From the Creator, Sustainer and Governor of All Creation
Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

“All of creation is renewed by the Holy Spirit, returning to its original state.”
(Anavathmoi, First Tone)

“Blessed are you, Lord, who alone daily renew the work of your hands.” (Basil the Great)

Brother concelebrants and blessed children in the Lord,

As everyone knows, September 1st of each year has been dedicated at the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – and recently also by the Roman Catholic Church – as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment. On this day, we especially beseech the supreme God to gladden His creation so that human life therein may be joyful and fruitful. This prayer includes of course the petition that the inevitable natural climate changes may occur and be permitted within tolerable levels both for human survival and for the planet's sustainability.

Nonetheless, we humans – whether as individual groups or collectively – behave contrary to this very request. For we suppress nature in such a manner that unforeseeable and undesirable changes occur to the climate and environment, which are negatively affected in their normal functions with consequent implications for life itself. The cumulative result of actions by particular individuals as well as by corporate and state activities with a view to reforming the natural environment so that it might produce more resources for those who take advantage of it only leads to the destruction of creation, which was created good by God and thus functions in a balanced way.

Those of us who appreciate the danger of climate change that is only increasing by day for our planet as a result of human actions raise our voice to highlight this crisis and invite everyone to explore what could be done “so that life is not lost for the sake of greed.” (United Nations Declaration)

Therefore, as Ecumenical Patriarch, we have expended years of efforts to inform the faithful of our Church and all people of good will about the grave risks deriving from growing (ab-)use of energy resources, which threatens increasing global warming and threatens the sustainability of

the natural environment.

Orthodox Christians have learned from the Church Fathers to restrict and reduce our needs as far as possible. In response to the ethos of consumerism we propose the ethos of asceticism, namely an ethos of self-sufficiency to what is needed. This does not mean deprivation but rational and restrained consumption as well as the moral condemnation of waste. “So if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6.8), as the Lord’s Apostle urges us. And after the multiplication of the five loaves and the satisfaction of five thousand people, excluding women and children, Christ Himself ordered His disciples to collect the remainder “so that nothing would be lost.” (John 6.12) Unfortunately, contemporary societies have abandoned the application of this commandment, surrendering to wastefulness and irrational abuse to satisfy vain desires of prosperity. However, such conduct can be transformed for the sake of creating resources and energy by more appropriate means.

Brothers and sisters, children in our common Lord and Creator, Human beings have destroyed creation through greed by focusing exclusively on this earth and its earthly benefits, which we endeavor to increase constantly, like the “rich fool” in the Gospel parable. (Luke 12. 13-21) We ignore the Holy Spirit, in whom we live and move and have our being. This signifies that the response to the ecological crisis can only be successfully realized in the Holy Spirit, through whose grace our human efforts are blessed and all creation is renewed, returning to its original state, as it was created and intended by God – namely, “very good.” This is why the responsibility of humanity, as God’s co-creator endowed with free will, is immense for any proper response to the ecological crisis.

This earth resembles “an immense pile of filth.” (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 2015) And impurity implies more than simply material things; it primarily includes spiritual things. There are the impurities that essentially stem from the passionate thoughts of humanity. With firm faith in the Pantokrator and Creator of all creation, we Orthodox Christians are called to carry out the work of an evangelist and missionary with regard to the protection of creation. That is to say, we are called to rekindle the joyful gospel message to the modern troubled world and awaken the sleeping spiritual nature of a humanity diversely and multifariously distressed in order to convey a message of hope, peace and true joy – the peace and joy of Christ.

This is what we believe and proclaim from the most holy Apostolic and Patriarchal Ecumenical Throne. And we invite everyone to soberness of life, purification of passionate thoughts and selfish motivations, so that we may dwell in harmony with our neighbors and with God’s creation. Finally, we pray with Basil the Great, “who extolled the nature of things”: “Blessed are you, Lord, who alone daily renew the work of your hands. Blessed are you, Lord, who created light and darkness, distinguishing between them from each other. Blessed are you, Lord, who created all things and constructed the shadow of death by blackening the day into night. Blessed are you, Lord, who created humankind in your image and likeness, who made the day for the work of light and the night for human nature to rest . . .” (Psalter and Prayer Book, Pantokrator Monastery, Mt. Athos, 2004)

This is our message, conviction and exhortation to you all: Let us stand well; let us stand in awe

before God's creation.

May the grace and boundless mercy of our Lord, the Creator of all creation, both visible and invisible, be with you all and with the whole world, now and to the endless ages. Amen.

September 1, 2015

+Bartholomew of Constantinople

Fervent supplicant of all before God