

Message of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW

on

The Day of the Protection of the Environment

September 1, 1992

To Orthodox Christians everywhere and to all God-fearing pious people, grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, in sanctification of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

The beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year, which is sanctified by the traditional celebration of the "Indictus," also constitutes a characteristic juncture in the life of the whole of creation all around us. This juncture is known to those in the Northern Hemisphere of our planet as the commencement of autumn and to those in the South as the beginning of spring.

Thus, "autumn" and "spring," which to the average person usually signify diametrically opposed factors, in the inauguration of the Ecclesiastical Year actually converge as one entity established by God.

The faithful, therefore, are able to recognize that, in essence, beginning and end constitute two aspects of the same created reality, which is bound to march toward its final destination in both "glory" and "infamy." Therefore, we should not allow the shape and rhythm of the present world to frighten us.

In accepting this fundamental truth, we become steadfast and immovable upon the rock of faith. Thus our sorrowful journey through what is "passing" and what is "stable" is delivered, at the very outset, from the moral danger which ever lies in ambush, namely, that of elevating ourselves to the whim of power which starts from the ground up or sinking impiously into the obscurity of despair in the end and out of worldly weakness.

In the language of the Patristics, man is "a being who borders" between material and spiritual creation. He is a "borderer" with regard to time as well; thus, in "an hour of temptation" he is able to courageously foretaste the "day of salvation."

Through the sacred correlations mentioned above, however, the whole of creation is by no means reduced to a level of irresponsible relativity and relativism. On the contrary, in this way, creation emerges in its God-pleasing uniqueness and sacredness; thus, "summer" and "winter," "light" and "darkness," "greatness" and "smallness," "instant" and "eternal," "material" and "spiritual," "divine" and "human," are proven not as being contrary to each other, but rather, as being deeply correlated inasmuch as the salvific will of the benevolent God who is beyond all things is realized gradually in time and space through all these things.

It is, however, precisely within the framework of the sacred interlinking and correlation of the ideas mentioned above that God has not allowed man to be a mere spectator or an irresponsible consumer of the world and of all that is in the world. Entirely to the contrary, man has been called to take on the task of being primarily a partaker and a sharer in the responsibility for everything in the created world. Having been endowed from the beginning with "the image of God," man, consequently, is called to continually transcend himself so that in responsible synergy with God the Creator he might sanctify the entire world, thus becoming a faithful "minister" and "steward."

It is clear that the concepts of minister and steward exceed by far the contemporary internationally accepted ideal of a person called "an ecologist" not having any further qualifications. Usually, we know neither how he understands the concept of "ojor" [house] nor how he regards "kcor" [word]. Today everyone speaks of the dangers of the "ecosystem" as numbering in the thousands without making even the slightest reference to God who "constituted" all things. There are those who anxiously keep records of constantly perishing "deposits" of the main elements of life and movement in nature, again without saying a word about God, Who in his infinite goodwill and beneficence is the "depositor" of all His goods for our use and nourishment. In wisdom he "established heaven and earth," thus abundantly enriching the universe with every kind of source of living water.

At any rate, just by becoming God's minister and steward over all of creation, does not mean that man simply prospers or is happy in the world. This would be crude self-sufficiency and impious minimalism. The main and lasting benefit of these qualifications is that man, by piously using the world, experiences the blessed evolution from the stage of "God's image" to that of "His likeness," in the same way that all the other good elements of the universe are transformed, by the grace of God and even without human intervention, from the "potential" stage to

that of "action" in fulfillment of the pre-eternal plan of the entire divine economy.

Addressing the faithful of the Church and every man of goodwill with these pious thoughts, we wish worthily and in a manner pleasing to God to celebrate the inauguration of the "Indictus" on this special day for the protection of all creation which was established three years ago by our Mother Holy Great Church of Christ and which has been accepted by all Orthodox. Having done so, we should like to take the God-given opportunity to invite and encourage every person, and above all the faithful, to constantly watch over his fellow man and the world, for the benefit of us all and for the glory of the Creator.

Our words on this auspicious day and the sacred thoughts which reach beyond these words are more timely in that they are addressed from the sacred center of the Phanar on the occasion of the first and historic assembly of all the hierarchs in active service of the most venerable Ecumenical Throne. Through this sacred assembly the Mother Church seeks more direct coaction and better coordination by the Holy and Sacred Synod with the hierarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate throughout the world, those who shepherd dioceses and those who serve in some other capacity.

This assembly of our hierarchy, which the Holy Synod decided to convene bi-annually, in addition to the other blessings it brings -- namely, the close communion of brothers who share responsibility, the exchange of information, and mutual support, etc. -- certainly provides great comfort and encouragement also to the children of the Church scattered in the four corners of the earth and represented here by their spiritual leaders. When the faithful around the world from time to time see all the hierarchy presented as one body, they recognize it as "divine intervention" against the temptations, sorrows and dangers in the world, and thus feel greater security in God.

Therefore, we fraternally greet the hierarchs gathered here from the ends of the earth; and to the rest of the clergy and to the faithful of the Holy Great Church of Christ, those near and far, we pray that the new Ecclesiastical Year, inaugurated on this auspicious occasion, will be blessed by the Lord, and that His grace and infinite mercy will be with you all.

Fervently praying to God for you,

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople