

† **BARTHOLOMEW**

By God's Mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch
To the Entire Church: Grace and Peace from the Creator, Sustainer and
Governor of all Creation, our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ

Blessed brothers, sisters and children in the Lord,

The common Mother of all Orthodox, the Church of Christ, the Body of our eternal Lord and divine-human Jesus Christ, compassionately ministers through all of its activities, but especially through the Divine Eucharist, by offering its holy gifts to their Creator in the mystery of salvation. It does this with proven boundless and indiscriminate love toward all of its members to the degree also demonstrated by our heavenly Father.

In its prayerful memory, the Church always bears in mind the presence of its children, maintaining a vivid interest and concern for all that relates to and influences their lives. This is why it does not remain unmoved or indifferent by the on-going and daily destruction of the natural environment resulting from human greed and vain profit, which in turn implies an essential turning of the Lord's face and results in consequential turbulence in nature and fracture in its crown, namely human existence, whose very survival is threatened.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has for many years assessed the signs of our times as well as we have the Eucharistic obligation of the Orthodox Church. Thus, we declared and devoted the commencement of the ecclesiastical year, namely, September 1st as a day of prayer and supplication for the preservation of God's creation, which has been inherited by us as our environment. On this day, we bow our heart and soul, invoking God's Word to look down upon His creation with loving kindness that He might overlook our sinfulness and greed, "opening up His hand to fill all of creation with goodness" and bring an end to the destructive path of the world.

Of course, it is true that significant progress has been achieved in the last decades with regard to protecting the environment, especially through constantly raising awareness of public consciousness, assuming precautionary and restrictive measures, creating sustainable programs, returning to more moderate energy sources, as well as many other fruitful and noteworthy activities. The effort and concern of the Mother Church of Constantinople has greatly contributed to this progress in cooperation with international ecological institutions and organizations. Nonetheless, all this is insufficient.

As we celebrate once again this year the Feast of the Byzantine Indiction, and as we inaugurate a new year of the Lord's grace, we address the blessed plenitude of the Orthodox Church and the entire world, inviting all people to continued vigilance, consciousness and mobilization of their resources in order to return to the state that reflects – if not the absolute Eucharistic and doxological condition of Adam and Eve – at least the condition inspired by God's grace and mercy.

The unlimited and insatiable exploitation of the natural resources of creation, which constitutes the primary cause of the destruction of the natural environment, is – according to the witness of theology, science and the arts – the result of man's fall, that is to say, our disobedience to the Lord's command and non-conformation to God's will.

However, the Church provides the antidote for the resolution to our ecological crisis, inviting everyone to the restoration of the divine image to its former and original beauty. The rehabilitation of the fallen human nature by means of the breath of the Holy Spirit and participation of its gifts also restores a balanced relationship between humanity and creation, which was made by God for our joy and enjoyment, but also for us to offer up to Him as its Creator.

The Mother Church calls us “to cultivate the whole of creation in the divine Word and life-giving Spirit,” just as St. Symeon the Stylite, whom we celebrate today, so that we may ascend “from the natural to the supernatural” and commit ourselves “to the simple and absolute mystical visions of theology” in order to be raised from creation to the Creator. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that defies humankind and, at the same time, unites it with the natural environment in order that we may perceive it as part of our very selves and respect it as something sacred without deviating toward abuses and extremes.

The nurturing of humanity by the natural world cannot possibly occur through greedy abuse but by respectful use, namely, by mutual respect among human beings and all created beings as well as with everything that has life and offers life, which was created “very good” by God's word, namely, with all the elements of creation both visible and invisible. Thus, we shall be able to drink water from the life-creating stone, to behold the created sun and conceive the spiritual Sun of righteousness, to look upon the material column of St. Symeon and see the true column of light, to witness the rainy clouds and enter the cloud of the Holy Spirit in order that we may rest there, where Christ entered as our forerunner, and have our names recorded with the first-born in the heavenly Church.

It is only when we proceed with this mindset – respecting the contribution of every living being and flora in the universal liturgy of life – that we can resolve with the power of divine grace and not by means of the weakly human violence all of our environmental challenges. This message of life is a message of our responsibility to continue our spiritual struggle and effort with prayer, exhortation, encouragement and appeal, attracting the attention of all people with regard to the necessity to protect ourselves from the imminent wrath resulting from our estrangement from nature. The constant focus of humanity on earthly and corruptible things

provokes the ecological problems inasmuch as, when we increasingly turn toward the earth and this world, we are increasingly alienated from heaven and God.

The Holy Mother and Great Church of Christ unceasingly assumes and cultivates this mandatory and salvific responsibility for the protection of the environment for the spiritual and material continuation of life on our planet. Therefore, in this regard, it is organizing an Environmental Summit next June on the theme of “Theology, Ecology and the Word: A Conversation on Environment, Literature and the Arts.” The aim of this conference is to awaken the global consciousness to the particular and specific importance of the ethical and spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis – with special reference to the arts and literature – in order that it may be returned to its “original beauty,” which is the natural, whole and sacred purpose for which it was fashioned by the creative hands of the Divine Word.

Having “within ourselves the inviolable memory of the Lord’s judgment,” we give witness from this Sacred Centre of all Orthodoxy to the truth of the Word and draw the attention of all to the dangers that lie before us, which God’s grace will surely avoid in its loving providence. And we invite everyone to work for the preservation and return of our world to the Source of Life, through the intercessions of our All-holy and Ever-blessed Theotokos, of St. Symeon the Stylite, and of all the Saints. Amen.

September 1, 2014
Your Fervent Suppliant before God,
† **Bartholomew of Constantinople**