

Prot. No. 718

+ BARTHOLOMEW

By the Mercy of God

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome And Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Fullness of the Church

Grace and Peace from the Creator and Sustainer of All Creation

Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

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Beloved brothers and children in the Lord,

Our God, who created the universe and formed the earth as a perfect dwelling place for humanity, granted us the commandment and possibility to increase, multiply and fulfill creation, with dominion over all animals and plants.

The world that surrounds us was thus offered to us as a gift by our Creator as an arena of social activity but also of spiritual sanctification in order that we might inherit the creation to be renewed in the future age. Such has always been the theological position of the Holy Great Church of Christ, which is the reason why we have pioneered an ecological effort on behalf of the sacred Ecumenical Throne for the protection of our planet, which has long suffered from us both knowingly and unknowingly.

Of course, **biodiversity** is the work of divine wisdom and was not granted to humanity for its unruly control. By the same token, **dominion** over the earth and its environs implies rational use and enjoyment of its benefits, and not destructive acquisition of its resources out of a sense of

greed. Nevertheless, especially in our times, we observe an excessive abuse of natural resources, resulting in the destruction of the environmental balance of the planet's ecosystems and generally of ecological conditions, so that the divinely-ordained regulations of human existence on earth are increasingly transgressed. For instance, all of us – scientists, as well as religious and political leaders, indeed all people – are witnessing a rise in the atmosphere's temperature, extreme weather conditions, the pollution of ecosystems both on land and in the sea, and an overall disturbance – sometimes to the point of utter destruction – of the potential for life in some regions of the world.

Inasmuch as the Mother Church perceives and evaluates the ensuing dangers of such ecological conditions for humanity, already from the time of our blessed predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios, established September 1st of each year as a day of prayer for the natural environment. Yet, we are obliged to admit that the causes of the aforementioned ecological changes are not inspired by God but initiated by humans. Thus, the invocation and supplication of the Church and us all to God as the Lord of lords and Ruler of all for the restoration of creation are essentially a petition of **repentance** for our **sinfulness** in destroying the world instead of working to preserve and sustain its ever-flourishing resources reasonably and carefully.

When we pray to and entreat God for the preservation of the natural environment, we are ultimately imploring God to change with mindset of the powerful in the world, enlightening them not to destroy the planet's ecosystem for reasons of financial profit and ephemeral interest. This in turn, however, also concerns each one of us inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage in our individual capacity and ignorance. Therefore, in

praying for the natural environment, we are praying for personal repentance for our contribution – smaller or greater – to the disfigurement and destruction of creation, which we collectively experience regionally and occasionally through the immense phenomena of our time.

In addressing this appeal, petition and exhortation from the sacred Center of Orthodoxy to all people throughout the world, we pray that our gracious Lord, who granted this earthly paradise to all people dwelling on our planet, will speak to the hearts of everyone so that we may respect the ecological balance that He offered in His wisdom and goodness, so that both we and future generations will enjoy His gifts with thanksgiving and glorification.

May this divine wisdom, peace and power, which created and sustains and guides all creation in its hope for salvation in the kingdom, always maintain the beauty of the world and the welfare of humanity, leading all people of good will to produce fruitful works toward this purpose. And we invoke His grace and mercy on all of you, particularly those who respect and protect creation. Amen.

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