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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 THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH
GRACE, PEACE AND MERCY FROM THE MAKER OF ALL CREATION
OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

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Most reverend brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

Thirty-five whole years have lapsed since the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate established September 1st, the Feast of the Indiction and opening of the ecclesiastical year, as a Day of Prayers for the Protection of the Natural Environment. This blessed initiative had a great resonance and borne bountiful fruit. The multidimensional ecological activities of the Holy Great Church of Christ today center around the phenomenon of climate change—or rather, the climate crisis—which has caused a “planetary state of emergency.”

We appreciate the contribution of the environmental movements, the international agreements for the environment, the related engagement on the part of scientists with this problem, the contribution of environmental education, the ecological sensitivity and mobilization of countless people and especially representatives of the younger generation. However, we insist that what is needed is an axiological “Copernican turn,” a radical change of mentality globally, a substantial revision of the relationship between humankind and nature. Otherwise, we will continue to treat the catastrophic consequences of the ecological crisis, while leaving intact and active the roots of the problem.

The environmental threat is a dimension of the extended crisis in contemporary civilization. In this sense, confronting the problem cannot be successful on the basis of the principles of the same civilization, of the rationale behind it, which created it in the first place. We have repeatedly expressed our conviction that churches and religions can contribute significantly to a vital spiritual and evaluative conversion for the sake of the future of humanity and the planet. Genuine religious faith dissolves the arrogance and titanism of humankind, inasmuch as it constitutes the embankment of its transformation into a “man-god,” who abolishes all standards, boundaries, and values, while declaring himself “the measure of all things” and instrumentalizing both his fellow human beings and nature for the satisfaction of his unquenchable needs and arbitrary pursuits.

The centuries-long experience teaches us that, without an “Archimedean” spiritual and evaluative support, humanity cannot avoid the risks of a nihilistic

“anthropologism.” This is the legacy of the classical spirit, as articulated by Plato through the principle that “God is the measure of all things for us” (*Laws* 716c). This understanding of humanity and its responsibility through its relationship with God is expressed through the Christian teaching about the creation of Adam “in the image of God” and “according to His likeness,” as well as about the assumption of human nature by the incarnate pre-eternal Word of God for our salvation and the renewal of all creation. The Christian faith recognizes the supreme value of humanity and creation alike. In this spirit, then, respect for the sacredness of the human person and the protection of the integrity of the “very good” creation are inseparable. Faith in the God of wisdom and love inspires and supports the creative forces of humankind, strengthening it in the face of challenges and trials, even when overcoming these appears humanly impossible.

We have struggled and still strive for an inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian collaboration for the protection of humanity and creation, as well as for the introduction of this subject in interfaith dialogue and common actions of religions. Moreover, we particularly emphasize the need to understand that the contemporary ecological crisis impacts first and foremost the poorer inhabitants on earth. In the document of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, entitled “For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” this topic is underlined emphatically along with the essential concern of the Church in light of the consequences of climate change: “We must understand that serving our neighbor and preserving the natural environment are intimately and inseparably connected. There is a close and indissoluble bond between our care of creation and our service to the body of Christ, just as there is between the economic conditions of the poor and the ecological conditions of the planet. Scientists tell us that those most egregiously harmed by the current ecological crisis will continue to be those who have the least. This means that the issue of climate change is also an issue of social welfare and social justice.” (Paragraph 76)

In conclusion, we wish you, most honorable brothers and most beloved children, a new ecclesiastical year full of divine blessings and productivity, invoking upon you all, through the intercession of Panagia Pammakaristos, whose wondrous and miraculous icon we honor and celebrate on this day and humbly venerate, the life-giving grace and boundless mercy of the Creator of all and God of wondrous things.

September 1, 2024

† Bartholomew of Constantinople
Fervent supplicant for all before God