

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Message for the the 5th Halki Seminar

18 April 2005

To the readership our Modesty's beloved children in the Lord: Grace and peace from God.

As a result of the first five environmental Summer Seminars on Halki (1994-1999) we have established that the protection of the environment in which humanity lives is a divine commandment. Our position is founded upon God's commandment to those whom he first created, that they, according to the teaching of our faith, "labor and tend the garden" in which they were first placed by Him. This is the theological basis for humankind's role in the protection of the environment. Thus, at the beginning of this new millennium, it is not only our divine obligation to labor and utilize the fruits of His gifts on this terrestrial globe, but also we, as His most humble servants, are responsible for tending of the garden of Eden.

Keeping this garden in proper condition and then keeping and protecting it after the dispersions of peoples all over the earth is also our respectful duty to our fellow human beings, as well as to generations to come. For the pollution or destruction of a single element of the environment brings hardship on the life of another. Consequently, there is an ethical responsibility on our part that we not make life difficult for our fellow human beings.

Heroditus tells us that among certain ancient peoples there was a well known custom that they not pollute the rivers which they believed to be in the divine order of things. Certainly conveyed here was an ethical condemnation of the hardship brought upon the lives of one's fellow human beings who use the flowing waters further downstream. Also well known is the commandment of Moses to the Israelites dwelling in the desert, that they follow what is described in the Bible (Old Testament) by taking certain measures to conceal and bury the polluted wastes and keep their environment clean and healthy.

Thus, today, we are able to say that the Christian religion, the Jewish religion, and the Muslim religion- which accepts part of the Old Testament as encompassing the declaration of God's will to humankind- we are obliged to emphasize that tending and protecting the earthly environment and, in general, the worldly environment in which we live, is a commandment of God, and as such, a religious obligation.

The highlights of the first five Summer Seminars on Halki in the Holy and Patriarchal and Stauropegial Monastery of the Holy Trinity, which were dedicated to the protection of the environment, have been carefully chosen for this volume. They range in themes from ethics to religious education to community action, but all underscore humankind's role in protecting the garden of Eden, our greatest gift from God, our all-loving creator.

This volume also represents the hope that by its circulation and study, the reader will fulfil his or hers most sacred duty and help make this garden which we all share a cleaner and better place.....

May the grace and the infinite mercy of the Creator of all creation be with you all.

At the Phanar, 18 April 2005

Your fervent supplicant before God,

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople