

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Message for World Environment Day

June 5, 2009

Today's World Environment Day is an opportunity as well as an invitation for all of us, irrespective of religious background, to consider the ecological crisis.

In our time, more than ever before, there is an undeniable obligation for all to understand that environmental concern for our planet does not comprise a romantic notion of the few. The ecological crisis, and particularly the reality of climate change, constitutes the greatest threat for every form of life in our world. Moreover, there is an immediate correlation between protection of the environment and every expression of economic and social life.

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For our Orthodox Church, the protection of the environment as God's creation is the supreme responsibility of human beings, quite apart from any material or other financial benefits that it may bring. The almighty God bequeathed this "very beautiful" world (Gen. 1.26) to humanity together with the commandment to "serve and preserve" it. Yet, the direct correlation of this divine mandate for the protection of creation to every aspect of contemporary economic and social life, ultimately enhances the global effort to control the problem of climate change by effectively introducing the ecological dimension into every aspect of life.

With the opening of this third millennium, environmental issues – already evident since the 20th century – acquired a new intensity, coming to the forefront of daily attention. According to the theological understanding of the Orthodox Christian Church, the natural environment is part of Creation and is characterized by sacredness. This is why its abuse and destruction is a sacrilegious and sinful act, revealing prideful despise toward the work of God the Creator.

Humanity, too, is part of this Creation. Our rational nature, as well as the capacity to choose between good and evil, bestow upon us certain privileges as well as

clear responsibilities. Unfortunately, however, human history is filled with numerous examples of misuse of these privileges, where the use and preservation of natural resources has been transformed into irrational abuse and, often, complete destruction, leading occasionally to the downfall of great civilizations.

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Indeed, the care for and protection of Creation constitutes the responsibility of everyone on an individual and collective level. Naturally, the political authorities of each nation have a greater responsibility to evaluate the situation in order to propose actions, measures and regulations that will convince our communities of what must be done and applied. Yet, the responsibility of each individual is also immense both in one's personal and family life but also in one's role as an active citizen.

Thus, we call everyone to a more acute sense of vigilance for the preservation of nature and all creation, which God made in all His wisdom and love. And, from the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we invoke God's blessing for World Environment Day, offering praise to the Creator of all, to whom is due all glory, honor and worship.

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