

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I  
Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome

## The Day of Protection of the Environment

September 1, 2001  
(abridged)

The designation of September first, which marks the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year and a day of prayer for the environment by the Great Church of Christ, the Mother Church of Constantinople, reveals the great significance for man of the physical world which was created by God.

The double nature of the human person, consisting of body and soul, or matter and spirit, according to the “very good” creative will of God, requires the cooperation of man and nature, person and environment. Without this coordination the environment is unable to serve man according to its purpose, nor is man able to avert the disturbance of natural balances or the obliteration of the natural harmony which God created from him.

*“Human beings produce... the contemporary plagues...  
of cancer, heart diseases, anxieties and other diseases.”*

Unfortunately, due to his desire to gain power and wealth, man often trespasses on the limits of the endurance of nature and subjects it to maltreatment or abuse. On other occasions he transgresses the commandment of God to keep the natural creation and is indifferent to the maintenance of its integrity and natural balance.

*“We share responsibility for these tragedies, since we  
tolerate those... responsible for them and accept a  
portion of the fruit that results from this abuse of nature.”*

The result of this behavior is the disturbance of natural harmony and the rebellion, as it were, of impersonal nature, which produces phenomena that are the exact opposite to those that serve man’s life. The radiation of a power that should benefit man becomes an explosive potency of inconceivable destruction. The rivers that are meant to be bearers of life-giving water become carriers of destructive floods.... Rain is changed from a means of irrigating plants and watering animals to a cause of drowning and uncontrollable currents. Sources of energy and heat become atmospheric pollution. In general, the natural possibilities, which are designed to serve man’s survival are stretched by man beyond their limits and bring avenging powers, when their permissible use is transformed into a means of satisfaction for human audacity vis-à-vis the limits of nature.

The audacity of the builders of the Tower of Babel produced a break in human understanding and communication. Men’s exclusive turning to the carnal aspect of their being, to the exclusion

of the spiritual aspect, brought about the purging cataclysm of Noah's times. Since then, God refrains from letting natural disaster bring man back to his senses, as the rainbow symbolizes. Nevertheless, man continues to pursue his greedy efforts to force nature into mass production and unnatural usages, and as a result he procures terrible environmental disasters that damage humanity. We recall here well-known calamities from nuclear explosions and radioactive waste, or from acid rain and polluting spillages. We recall also the consequences of force feeding vegetarian animals to produce extra food quantities in a way that constitutes an overthrow of the natural order. It is indeed becoming widely accepted that the overthrow of this natural order by human beings produces ill reactions to the human organism, such as the contemporary plagues of cancer, heart diseases, anxieties and a multitude of other diseases.

All these [examples] bear witness to the fact that it is not God, but man that causes these modern plagues, since "he is the most disastrous of the disasters" as the ancient tragedy puts it. Thus, if we want to improve the material and psychological conditions for humanity, we are obliged to recognize and respect the natural order, harmony and balance, and to avoid causing disarray in the natural forces, which are released when the universal harmony, especially the ecological one, is audaciously overturned. Nature was placed by God into the service of man, on the condition that man would respect the laws that pertain to it and would work in it and protect it (cf. Genesis 2:15).

*"We need to ask for God's illumination so that we may understand the limit between the use and the abuse of nature and never trespass it."*

On this day, which has been dedicated by the Mother Church to prayer for the environment, we supplicate the Lord to restore with his divine power the natural order wherever human audacity has overturned it, so that humanity might not suffer the tragic consequences of violations of nature.... We all share responsibility for these tragedies, since we tolerate those immediately responsible for them and accept a portion of the fruit that results in this abuse of nature. Consequently, we need to ask for God's illumination so that we may understand the limit between the use and the abuse of nature and never trespass it.

We wholeheartedly wish that God reveals this limit to each of us and that He gives us the wisdom and strength not to trespass it. The Grace and the rich Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all, my brethren and dear sons and daughters in Christ.

Amen.

