

Message of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the day dedicated to the Protection of the Natural Environment

September 1st, 1993

[Translated from the Greek original]

Together with the other Most Holy sister Orthodox Churches, we have established the 1st day of September of each year as a special day of concern and prayer for nature around us. Again this year, we are called to offer wholehearted praise to the Creator of everything visible and invisible for having placed us as the ones First-fashioned in luscious paradise among all His own creation. The most fundamental Orthodox doctrine - which addresses impartially the all-powerfulness, the all-wisdom, the extreme goodness and the wakeful providence of the Creator, as well as the consideration and high regard for created being and matter in general, with man as its crowning point - is indeed the doctrine of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. There are those who, contemplating only what concerns the world and recognizing the philosophical "web of the Athenians," speak with irony of the conviction of faithful believers with regard to creation *ex nihilo*. In confronting this point, they cite the merit of the corrupted and, frivolous in its redundancy, refutable notion that "ex nihilo, nothing can be amassed" with the exception that, before there was absolute nothingness in relation to the world, God, who is without beginning or successor, who is beyond

and above space, time, quality, quantity, causal relationship or dependency, has always preceded and commanded. Since John the Evangelist, in his epigram "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:16), gave God, who lacks nothing and is without beginning, as a compendious name, the constituting love which is cardinal to all moral attributes, we, who have received the Revealed word of God, are justified in believing that everything has been created out of absolute love and in absolute freedom by God the Maker and Father of all who, according to St. Paul, calls "things without being into being" (Rom. 4:17). Contemplating the creation of God within us and around us with this kind of God-given theological perspective, we are certainly justified at being overcome with total optimism even when the elements of nature are faced with the greatest dangers or when history is being distorted, because we recognize that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them" (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1). Therefore, before any abnormalities in nature and history, the first requirement is not so much that we be wise and powerful so as to foresee in time and deal accordingly with earthquakes, foundering and other usually unexpected calamities. Neither is it that we be armed with the provisions of worldly knowledge and science so as to drive back the powers marshalled against us by any enemy or invader. Rather, above all, we must be just, striving at every moment throughout our life to learn the precepts of God more perfectly and more profoundly. This is why it is not incidental that among the first things we do in Orthodox worship is praise the Lord,

invoking Him that we be taught His immovable precepts which are from Him only. Never are we so powerful and shielded from every unexpected force, as when we chant, as did the youths, the ode of the Beloved One: "Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your precepts." During this time, brothers and children in the Lord, when international organizations, inter-state legislations and scientific research programs are united in jeremiads and lamentations to toll the bell of danger so that man might sober up in time before the coming of mass chaos, which would threaten universal order and balance in the various so-called "eco-systems," not only of our planet, but of the entire cosmos, we, from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, addressing ourselves first to the conscience of every individual man, invite him each day and with innocent heart to taste the good things of God, as one partaking in trembling fear -- but, simultaneously, in doxology and joyfulness -- of the good things of creation. Panic never has allowed man to render judgments calmly and to balance justly his obligations towards himself, towards the world around him, and towards his ever-watchful God above him. However, it is precisely these obligations, as they have been coordinated from the very first moment of creation by the Just-Judging God, which constitute "His precepts" of which we have spoken above. Usually, men speak out and go to great pain to mark and establish human rights, which, as a rule, are determined by self-interest and fear and always give rise to powers and demands, which separate persons from groups, from classes, from people. The precepts of God, on the contrary, are by definition comprehensive,

as much for the part as for the whole. This is why, by learning and recognizing them, they, through God's grace, render human beings brothers and partakers among themselves and, through eucharistic usage, partakers of the world and of the infinite love of God, and not consumers, which the atheistic polity or contemporary eudemonistic herd instinct through the hubristic progress of technology have taught. Thus, the first responsibility of the faithful is, at least, to examine and study continuously in greater depth the law and precepts of God. Thus, by becoming cheerful givers and grateful receivers of His wondrous things in this world, we may come to respect the balances of nature set up by Him. May the grace of the All-compassionate and All-benevolent God, together with our paternal and patriarchal blessings and prayers, be with all who fear the Lord.