

**Message of His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
1 September 2016**

Beloved sons and brothers of the Lord,

Following for many years the catastrophic world developments in environmental matters, the Holy and Great Mother Church of Christ, on its own initiative set the start of every ecclesiastical year as a day dedicated to Creation, to the environment, calling during this day upon the whole Orthodox and Christian world to raise a prayer and supplication to the Creator of all, to give thanks for the great gift of Creation, make supplications for the protection and safeguarding from every visible and invisible attack by man. Therefore also this year during the aforementioned day, from the Ecumenical Patriarchy we recall the need to make EVERYONE aware of the ecological problems faced by our planet.

The constant rapid progress of technology and the possibility and facilities which it offers to contemporary man should not lead us astray so as not to seriously consider, before initiating any technological undertaking, the damage which it can do to the natural environment and society and subsequently the unfavourable related consequences – and they are becoming revealed as such – rather dangerous and catastrophic for creation and the life of lifeforms on earth.

This need moreover has been proclaimed by brother primates and bishops of local orthodox churches last June during the blessed meeting in the great island of Crete of the Holy and Great Synod presided by the Ecumenical Patriarch, emphasising in his Encyclical that “through the current development of science and technology our life is being radically changed. And that which provokes a change in the life of man requires his discernment from the moment that beyond notable advantages...we are also facing negative consequences of the scientific progress” amongst which the threat to and even the destruction of the natural environment.

Constant vigilance, training and teaching are needed so that the relationship is clarified between the current ecological crisis and human passions of cupidity, greed, egoism grasping voracity, from which passions and their fruits the environmental crisis we are living derives. This thus constitutes the only way, the return to the ancient beauty or order and the economy, of moderation which can lead to a wise management of the natural environment. Especially greed relating to the satisfaction of material needs certainly brings with it the spiritual poverty of man, which involves the destruction of the natural environment. “The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical, embedded in the heart of each man” the Synod emphasises addressing to-day’s world “the desire for a continuous growth of welfare and unbridled consumerism inevitably lead to the disproportionate use and exhaustion of natural resources (Cf. Decision on the “the mission of the Church”.

At the same time to-day we celebrate, beloved brothers and sons of the Lord, the memory of the Blessed Simon Stylite, this great column of your Church whose monument, with other marvellous archaeological sites in Syria and worldwide, such as ancient Palmyra recognised at world level as amongst the major monuments of cultural heritage, have suffered the barbarities and horrors of war witness a similar significant problem: the crisis of culture which in recent years has become worldwide. Moreover, environment and culture are united and of equal value and interchangeable. The world which embraces humanity has been created from a single command “become”. (cfr. Gen 1,3,6,14). Culture has been created by man endowed with a rational mind, so that even its respect is obvious and a duty, insofar as man is and is honoured as the crown of the Divine Creation.

Thus duly from this sacred centre of Orthodoxy, enriched by an extraordinary tradition and which conserves the broadest values which are the parameters of a cultural inheritance, we recall attention

of all those in positions of power and every man on the need for the parallel protection of the natural environment, which is in danger because of climate change and of conflicts and other events throughout the world. Cultural treasures, which like religious and spiritual monuments but also as 2000 year expression of the human mind, belong to all of humanity and not exclusively to the nations within whose borders they happen to be, run a risk in relation to the environment and moreover concern for the protection of the environment and the incalculable value of culture become judged as obligatory so that all humanity can live well.

The ruin and destruction of a cultural monument in a country wounds the universal heritage of humanity: moreover it is the duty and task of every human being especially of every civil nation to strengthen measures of uninterrupted protection and conservation of their own monuments.us it is indispensable that every legally constituted State should avoid actions which undermine the integrity of its “universal monuments” and which alter the intangible values which each represents.

Conscious of “our greatest responsibility” proclaimed in a panorthodox manner to transmit to future generations a liveable natural environment and its use in accordance with the divine will and blessing (Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod) and that “not only present generations but also future ones have the right to enjoy natural assets, given to us by the Creator”.

We call on everyone to mobilise their strength and especially to pray in the struggle for the protection of the environment in the widest sense of the term, or as a harmonious conjunction of the natural and environment of the human race and we supplicate Our Lord Jesus Christ, with the prayers of the Most Holy Mother of God Pammacaristos, with the voice of he who shouts in the desert John the Precursor, with the intercession of Simon Stylite and of all the saints, to protect our common natural and cultural home from every threat and destruction which emerges and to continually and generously concede His blessing upon it.

With reverence of the soul and a prayer from the heart, with all the faithful, praying to the Artificer of Creation, of things visible and invisible, of things understandable and intelligible to offer “a temperate and advantageous climate, calculated and tranquil rainfall so that the earth may fructify abundantly” and to concede to the entire world “a profound peace, a peace which is beyond all thought” we invoke upon all humanity and on the earth our home God’s infinite Grace and Mercy.

1 September 2016 The Patriarchate of Constantinople, fervent intercessor before God of all of you

1 Settembre 2016
Il Patriarca di Costantinopoli
Fervente intercessore presso Dio di voi tutti

Unofficial translation. The official translation by the Orthodox Patriarchy will be posted as soon as available.