

† B A R T H O L O M E W

By the Mercy of God,

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch,

To all the Faithful of the Church:

Grace, mercy, and peace from the Creator of all Creation

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>

*September 1, 1995*

KING, PRIEST, AND PROPHET

With the grace of God, we are called once again to celebrate the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year by making special reference, as was established several years ago, to our responsibility toward creation as it relates to the environment within and around us in general and more specifically toward what is referred to as the inanimate natural environment.

Within the context of the continuous and ever developing ecological concern over the years, the holy Great Church of Christ, the Mother Church, was blessed again this past year of 1995, to convene an international seminar on the environment, which was held on the fragrantly-scented island of Halki, in the venerable theological school and monastery of the Holy Trinity. This year's seminar had as its main theme "Environment and Ethics." We took advantage of the opportunity to offer certain appropriate introductory remarks – from the perspective of the Mother Church – regarding the sanctity of creation and the lofty responsibility of the human being created in God's image within the whole scheme of creation.

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<sup>1</sup> The customary address and introduction of encyclical letters on the occasion of the opening of the ecclesiastical year on September 1, which also marks the prescribed day of prayer for the protection and preservation of the natural environment in the Orthodox Church.

We take this occasion today as well to remind you of what in the seminar we referred to as a temporal sequence in the production of the various species of creation. This temporal sequence etches in stone our responsibility as administrators of God's creation in the world.

The Fathers of the Church, in a manner fitting to God and in appreciation of the temporal sequence mentioned above, taught that every species was created before humankind in order for humankind to enter into a full kingdom and serve there as king, priest, and prophet. We see, therefore, that what might be referred to as the three-fold office of the God-man, about which theology speaks at great length, has been extended to humankind from the very outset and by definition from our primeval relationships with natural creation.

What does it mean for us to reign, minister and teach in the vast expanse of creation? It means that we must constantly study, serve and pray to transform what is corruptible into what is incorruptible, to the extent that this can be accomplished during our lifetime.

The Church of the Incarnate Word of God continues His redemptive work in a world that is confused and constantly in a state of ambivalence. Therefore, the Church will never cease to remind the world of these fundamental truths regarding the position and orientation of the human person; rather, by word and deed, the Church teaches a way to life.

We, too, from the holy Great Church of Christ, are striving to fulfill this mission with all our strength. In the context of the celebrations of the 1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the recording of the Apocalypse by St. John on the island of Patmos, we have decided, along with our fellow bishops, to convoke an international ecological symposium. This symposium will sail from Istanbul to the sanctified land of Patmos – where civilizations from the east, west, north and south have intersected for centuries. Through this means, we shall attempt to reveal more extensively to the

eyes of the modern world the magnitude of creation in general, as this was envisioned through God's inspiration by the evangelist of love, St. John the Theologian.