

† 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 Christ¹

September 1, 2006

CATASTROPHIC ARROGANCE

The God of tender mercy and love for mankind created the cosmos to be a place of sublime beauty, serviceable and apt to the needs of every human being. Into such a world, God allowed the crown and monarch of His creation, the human person, to partake of everything in it that is needful for life.

Every necessary relationship of humanity with creation is conjoined with a sense of joy and satisfaction. If there is an excess or privation of what is, by its use, naturally good then there is an accompanying sensation of want (in the case of privation) or surfeit (in the case of excess). Thus does the human being possess in himself instinctively a means of measuring beneficial need or detrimental excess. The need manifests as privation; the excess manifests as wasteful superfluity. It follows then that all human beings, endowed with freedom of will, have the capacity to direct their own instinctual faculty to prescribe their own limits; whether to restrain such limits for reasons of ascetical discipline, or to exceed them by the power of desire.

Thus we find ourselves confronting this condition: either we are subject to

¹ 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.

greed (which is idolatry according to the Apostle Paul [Col. 3.5]), or to a certain hatred for life, for the natural blessings and gifts God, that is to attitudes which are equally unacceptable, being opposite to the perfect plan of God for humankind's enjoyment of life.

The unfortunate reality is that humanity has rejected to be shaped by the suggestions and inducements of God. We have not followed His guiding grace in determining the measure of our needs and how we use the world; how we work in the world or how we preserve the world. The result is that we behave toward the environment, toward nature, rapaciously and catastrophically. When we apply our own sense of mastery and not appropriate use we upset the natural harmony and equilibrium that is based in God. Nature reacts negatively and the result is that terrible desires pile up on the human family. Recent unusual fluctuations in temperature, typhoons, earthquakes, violent storms, the pollution of the seas and rivers, and the many other catastrophic actions for man and the environment ought to be an obvious alarm for something to be done with human behavior. The principal reason for this catastrophic behavior of contemporary man is his egocentrism, which is another face of self-reliance apart from God, and even self-divinization.

On account of this egocentrism, the relationship between humanity and nature has been radically altered. Now an impertinent, arrogant subjugation of the forces of nature has supplanted that which was designed by God. In place of the preservation of life and freedom, these forces serve to destroy and oppress our fellow man, or we indulge in excessive consumption, without regard to the consequences of such excess.

The use of atomic and nuclear forces of nature for warlike purposes constitutes unmitigated hubris. Whatever the manner of our over consumption, we have burdened the natural environment with such pollution that the earth's temperature is rising and many of nature's balancing acts are now unstable, with all that this implies.

The enormous amount of energy that is consumed for the purposes of the modern war-machine, as well as the prodigality of modern life that far exceeds the reasonable human needs of today, comprise two distinct sectors, in which the responsibilities of leaders and simple citizen are woven together in such a way that each has the capability of taking action for the betterment of the general condition.

Beloved children and brethren in the Lord, let us take action, each one from his own position and setting, giving every effort to an amelioration of senseless consumption. Let us work toward a restoration of a harmonious working of the planet on which we live, so that in tranquility our children may enjoy all the blessings of the creation of our loving God, the blessing He offers to all people.