

† 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, 2010

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Our ever-memorable predecessor, the late Patriarch Dimitrios, who possessed a deep awareness of the gravity of the environmental crisis, as well as of the responsibility of the Church to directly and effectively confront the crisis, issued the first official encyclical dealing with the protection of the natural environment more than two decades ago.² Through this encyclical, the Mother Church officially established the date of September 1st – the beginning of the ecclesiastical year – as a day of prayer for the protection of the environment, declaring it to the plenitude of the Church throughout the length and breadth of the world.

At that time, our Church insightfully emphasized the significance of the eucharistic and ascetic ethos of our tradition, that manifests our most important and most crucial unique contribution toward the proper and universal struggle for the protection of the natural environment as a Divine Creation and shared inheritance. Today, in the midst of an unprecedented financial crisis, humanity is facing many and diverse trials. But this trial is related not only to our individual hardships; this trial affects every aspect of human society, especially our behavior and perception

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.

² See Section I. Call to Vigilance and Prayer.

of the surrounding world and the way we rank our values and priorities.

It is important to note that the current grievous financial crisis may spark the much-reported and absolutely essential shift to environmentally viable development; i.e., to a standard of economic and social policy whose priority will be the environment, and not unbridled financial gain. Let us all consider as an example what may happen to countries that are suffering today on account of the financial crisis and poverty, such as Greece, which at the same time have exceptional natural riches: unique ecosystems, rare fauna and flora and natural resources, exquisite landscapes, abundant sunlight and wind. If ecosystems deteriorate and disappear, natural sources become depleted, and landscapes suffer destruction, and climate change produces unpredictable weather conditions, on what basis will the financial future of these countries and the planet as a whole depend?

We hold, therefore, that there is a dire need in our day for a combination of societal sanctions and political initiatives, such that there is a powerful change in direction, to a path of viable and sustainable environmental development.

For our Orthodox Church, the protection of the environment, as a divine and very good creation, embodies a great responsibility for every human person, regardless of material or financial benefits. The direct correlation of the God-given duty and mandate, to work and preserve, with every aspect of contemporary life constitutes the only way to a harmonious co-existence with each and every element of creation, and the entirety of the natural world in general.

Therefore, we call upon all of you, beloved brethren and children in the Lord, to take part in the titanic and righteous battle to alleviate the environmental crisis, and to prevent the even worse results that derive from its consequences. Let us motivate ourselves to harmonize our personal and collective life and attitudes with the needs of nature's ecosystems, so that every kind of fauna and flora in the world

and in the universe may live and thrive and be preserved.