

Prot. No. 887

+ BARTHOLOMEW

By God's mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome

And Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church:

Grace, peace and mercy from our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Maker of all creation

*September 1, 2016*

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

In following over many years the destructive developments in the world's environment, the Holy and Great Mother Church of Christ vigilantly assumed the initiative to establish the beginning of each ecclesiastical year as a day dedicated to God's creation, inviting all of the Orthodox and Christian world to offer prayers and supplications to the Maker of all things, in thanksgiving for the great gift of creation as well as in supplication for its protection and safeguarding from every assault, both visible from humankind and invisible. Thus, this year too, on this auspicious day, from the Ecumenical Throne we remind you of the need to awaken the conscience of all people to the ecological challenges faced today by our planet.

The contemporary rapid technological progress, together with the potential and provision that this offers to the modern world, must not disorientate us so as not to take into serious consideration the cost of each technological enterprise on the natural environment and civilization, as well as all the related negative consequences, which may – and are proven to – be very dangerous and destructive for creation and all things living on our planet.

Indeed, along with our brother Primates and Hierarchs of the local holy Orthodox Churches, we also proclaimed this need during the Holy and Great Council, which with God's blessing we convened last June on the great island of Crete under our modest presidency, highlighting in its Encyclical that "through the contemporary development of science and technology, our life is changing radically. And what brings about a change in the life of man demands discernment on his part, since apart from significant benefits . . . we are also confronted with the negative consequences of scientific progress," including the threat to and even the destruction of the natural environment.

We need to have constant vigilance, information and education in order to understand clearly the relationship between today's ecological crisis and our human passions of greed, materialism, self-centeredness, and rapacity, which result in and lead to the current crisis that we face. Therefore, the only way out of this impasse is our return to the original beauty of order and economy, of frugality and asceticism, which can guide us toward a more careful management of the natural environment. In fact, the voracious need to satisfy our material needs assuredly causes spiritual poverty, which in turn culminates in the destruction of the environment: "The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical, inhering within the heart of each man," as the same Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church emphasized in addressing the contemporary world, adding that "the yearning for continuous growth in prosperity and an unfettered consumerism inevitably lead to a disproportionate use and depletion of natural resources." (See the decision of the document "The Mission of the Church")

Accordingly, then, beloved brothers and sisters, as we commemorate today the feast of St. Symeon the Stylite, that great pillar of our Church, whose monument – like other wonderful archeological sites in Syria and the whole

world, such as the famous region of ancient Palmyra that are listed among the foremost global monuments of our cultural heritage – experienced the barbaric consequences of war, we would like to underline another equally significant problem, namely the cultural crisis, which has also become a global issue of our time. After all, environment and culture are concepts and values that are parallel and interconnected. As the environment of humankind, the world was created through the single-worded divine command: “Let there be!” (See Gen. 1.3, 6, and 14) Later, civilization was created by humanity, endowed with rational intellect, which in turn implies and imposes a sense of respect toward culture inasmuch as man is – and is respected – as the crown of divine creation.

This is why we regard it as our duty, from this Sacred Center of Orthodoxy, which retains the unique tradition and preserves the broader parameters of our cultural legacy and values, to bring to the attention of all responsible people – and every individual in general – the need to protect the global cultural inheritance as well, alongside the natural environment; for both of these are endangered by climate change, military conflict and other similar problems throughout the world.

The cultural treasures belong to all of humanity inasmuch as they are religious and spiritual monuments; moreover, as eternal expressions of human intellect, they do not belong exclusively to nations within the borders of which they are found. Nevertheless, they run the same risks as the natural environment, which is why the protection of the environment and the preservation of the invaluable principles of civilization are equally mandated for the welfare of all humanity.

The corruption or destruction of a single cultural monument in any country wounds the ecumenical legacy of all humankind. Thus, it is the duty

and obligation of everyone, and especially of every civilized nation, to strengthen all measures for protecting and preserving such monuments forever. Furthermore, each legal and lawful nation must avoid any action that affects the integrity of its “global monuments” or alters the spiritual values that these represent.

We are conscious of the Pan-Orthodox declaration about “our greatest responsibility to hand down a viable natural environment to future generations and to use it according to divine will and blessing” (Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council) and “that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator” (Decision of the Holy and Great Council on “The Mission of the Church”), we invite everyone to mobilize their forces, and in particular their prayers, in the struggle for the protection of the environment in its broader sense, namely in its inseparable interconnection to the natural and human-induced cultural environment. And we beseech our Lord Jesus Christ – through the intercessions of the All-Holy and All-Blessed Theotokos, the Forerunner John with his voice crying in the wilderness, Symeon the Stylite and all the Saints – to protect our common natural and cultural home from every assault and destruction, granting and showering His unceasing and abundant blessing on the whole world.

In contrite soul and heartfelt prayer, we pray with all the faithful to the Maker of all Creation – both visible and invisible, spiritual and intellectual – to grant us “seasonable and favorable winds, steady and calm rainfall, for the prosperous flourishing of the earth,” while providing the world with “profound peace, which surpasses all understanding,” and we invoke upon everyone throughout our planet-home the grace and boundless mercy of God.