

In 1989 Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios exercised truly *ecumenical* concern and foresight. The word ecumenical, rooted in the Greek word *oikos* indicates a concern for the whole household. It is the root that gives us economics (household management or order) and ecology (the study or science of the household).

1 September 1989

The Ecumenical Throne of Orthodoxy, keeper and proclaimer of the centuries-long spirit of the patristic tradition, and faithful interpreter of the Eucharistic and liturgical experiences of the Orthodox Church, watches with great anxiety the merciless trampling down and destruction of the natural environment which is caused by human beings, with extremely dangerous consequences for the very survival of the natural world created by God.

The abuse by contemporary man of his privileged position in the creation and of the Creator's order to him "to have dominion over the earth" (Gen. 1, 28), has already led the world to the edge of apocalyptic self-destruction, either in the form of natural pollution which is dangerous for all living beings, or in the form of the extinction of many species of the animal and plant world, or in various other forms. Scientists and other men of learning warn us now of the danger, and speak of phenomena which are threatening the life of our planet, such as the so called "greenhouse effect" whose first indications have already been noted.

In view of this situation the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved. It constitutes a fundamental dogma of her faith that the world was created by God the Father, who is confessed in the Creed to be "maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible". According to the great Fathers of the Church, Man is the prince of creation, endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being partaker simultaneously of the material and the spiritual world, he was created in order to refer creation back to the Creator, in order that the world may be saved from decay and death.

This great destiny of man was realized, after the failure and fall of the "first Adam", by the "last Adam", the Son and Logos of God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ, who united in His person the created world with the uncreated God, and who unceasingly refers creation to the Father as an eternal eucharistic Anaphora and offering. The Church in each divine Liturgy continues this reference and offering (of creation to God) in the form of the Bread and the Wine, which are elements taken from the material universe. In this way the Church continuously declares that Man is destined not to exercise power over creation, as if he were the owner of it, but to act as its steward, cultivating it in love and referring it in thankfulness, with respect and reverence, to its Creator.

Unfortunately, in our days under the influence of an extreme rationalism and self-centredness, man has lost the sense of sacredness of creation and acts as its arbitrary ruler and rude violator. Instead of the Eucharistic and ascetic spirit with which the Orthodox Church brought up her children for centuries, we observe today a violation of nature for the satisfaction not of basic human needs, but of man's endless and constantly increasing desires and lust, encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of the consumer society.

But creation "groans and labours in all its parts" (Rom. 8,22), and is now beginning to protest at its treatment by the human being. Man cannot infinitely and at his pleasure exploit the natural sources of energy. The price of his arrogance will be his self-destruction, if the present situation continues.

In full consciousness of our duty and our paternal spiritual responsibility, having taken all the above into consideration and having listened to the anguish of modern man, we have come to the decision, in common with the Sacred and Holy Synod surrounding us, to declare the first day of September of each year to be the day of the protection of the environment, a day on which, on the occasion of the feast of the Indiction, which is the first day of the ecclesiastical year, prayers and supplications are offered in this holy centre of Orthodoxy for all creation.

Therefore, we invite through this our Patriarchal Message the entire Christian world, to offer together with the Great Mother Church of Christ (the Ecumenical Patriarchate) every year on this day prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation. At the same time we paternally urge on the one hand all the faithful in the world to admonish themselves and their children to respect and protect the natural environment, and on the other hand all those who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing the nations to act without delay taking all necessary measures for the protection and preservation of the natural creation.

Finally, wishing all good things for the world from our Lord we bestow upon all our Patriarchal blessing.

Phanar, 1 September 1989

Dimitrios