Prot. No. 668

† B A R T H O L O M E W
BY THE MERCY OF GOD
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE–NEW ROME
AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
GRACE, PEACE, AND MERCY
UNTO THE ENTIRE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH
FROM THE FASHIONER OF ALL CREATION
OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

* * *

Most Reverend and Right Reverend Brother Hierarchs, and blessed children in the Lord,

By the grace of God, the giver of all good things, we enter today into the new ecclesiastical year, honouring and celebrating at its commencement, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the "Day of Prayer for the Protection of the Natural Environment."

The multidimensional contemporary ecological crisis is a crisis of human freedom, of our religion and philosophy, of our ethos and our culture. What comes first is the "harmful alteration" of our freedom — our severance and alienation from the Source of Life; what follows is conduct destructive of the natural environment. We feel profound gratitude that the pioneering initiatives and interventions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, carried out without interruption since 1989 have not only revealed the spiritual aspects of the ecological problem, but have also opened new paths and prospects for addressing it. The ecological symposia, the related inter-Christian and interreligious dialogues, the specific recommendations of the Great Church concerning environmental matters, the emphasis placed upon the social dimensions and consequences of the ecological crisis, and other such efforts together constitute a robust environmental proposal, which emphasizes the imperative need for a "Copernican Turn" in our understanding of the idea of progress and in humanity's attitude towards nature, as well as in the actions of those engaged in political, economic, and social life, of the Churches and religions, of science and technology, and of those responsible for the education of the younger generation.

We shall continue, in word and deed, to promote the ecological vision of the Holy Great Church of Christ and the eco-friendly dynamism of the eucharistic, ascetic, and doxological relationship with creation, always underscoring that careful theological work is needed for the elucidation of the authentic ecological message of our Orthodox faith and tradition, for the benefit of creation, which is "very good."

We are convinced that highlighting the religious and ethical dimensions of the ecological threat will lead to an awareness of the pivotal importance of "ecological

responsibility." Humanity must at last cease acting as though it does not know and definitively cast aside the illusion that planet Earth can in perpetuity withstand the burdens and destruction caused by human activity, or that nature has the power to renew itself of its own accord. The ethos of responsibility for the protection of the natural environment must find expression at the global, national, local, and personal levels. We reiterate once again that the cultivation of ecological responsibility is a "categorical imperative" for humanity as it confronts the greatest threat it has ever been called to face throughout the entire course of its history.

It is abundantly clear that, so long as the dominant anthropological model is represented by the "foolish rich man" of the Gospel (Luke 12:17–21), with his declaration, "I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there I will store all my crops and my goods," and his words, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry," humanity will continue to undermine its future and annihilate its own "home." The "sins of modernity" have created—and continue to create—new divisions and ruptures between humanity and nature. The contemporary "man-god" persists in genocide, disregarding every measure and limit in the name of geopolitical designs and economic interests, of consumerism and of the satisfaction of essentially insatiable needs, but also, on a deeper level, because of an overturning of inner lived experience and values. The consequences of the global dominance of the desire to manipulate, instrumentalize, and exploit nature will prove to be tragic for life on our planet.

The growing acceptance and official establishment of 1 September as the Day for the Protection of the Natural Environment throughout the Christian world bears particular significance today as a symbol and practical promotion of the unity of Christians. Moreover, the glorification of the "Fashioner of all creation" at the beginning of the Indiction in our liturgical tradition constitutes a precious inheritance, as an invitation and exhortation to respect creation, which suffers the consequences of an unseemly, human-caused assault.

Most Honourable Brethren and dearly beloved children,

Respect for the core pillars of ecological civilization can restrain environmentally destructive tendencies and open the "sole ecological path," that of sustainable development. More broadly, humanity needs to reach agreement upon a body of common fundamental values which, in a world marked by conflict and polarization, will serve as a compass for the journey towards the future. We regard the principle of solidarity as the central axis of this body of values: solidarity as a source of shared responsibility, dialogue, and sincere reciprocity, together with collective responsibility for the protection of the natural environment. Respect in practice for the sacredness of the human person and care for the integrity of creation are, from a Christian perspective, vital manifestations of the eucharistic realisation of the Church and of human being's call to become the "priest" of creation.

In this spirit, as we pray that the new ecclesiastical year may be favourable and fruitful in works that are good and pleasing to God, we invoke upon all of you, through the intercessions and mediation of the Most-Holy Theotokos Pammakaristos—whose most sacred icon we reverently keep in the Venerable Patriarchal Church and embrace "with mouth and heart and will"—the grace and mercy of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Whose All-Holy Name be blessed and glorified, now and ever, and unto the endless ages. Amen!

1 September 2026
† Bartholomew of Constantinople
Your fervent supplicant before God