

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
OF HIS ALL HOLINESS
THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
B A R T H O L O M E W
AT THE INAUGURAL PROCEEDINGS
OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS
SYMPOSIUM ON THE THEME: THE ADRIATIC SEA**

**"A SEA AT RISK, A UNITY OF PURPOSE"
(6 June 2002)**

Your Beatitude,
Most learned participants,
Beloved sons and daughters in the Lord,

First, we thank God the Creator, Provider and Governor of the Universe, for the joy of this auspicious gathering, motivated by our common and vivid interest in the environment granted to us by the Creator.

We address a heartfelt, friendly greeting and wish you all a pleasant stay, inspiring thoughts, creative deliberations, and a positive outcome in this sea-borne symposium, as well as a good harvest of profitable conclusions.

The present conference constitutes part of a series of similar symposia, during which the environment, and especially that which is connected with rivers and seas, is examined from the points of view of its present as well as its ideal conditions, on the basis of both religious principles and scientific precepts. This year our exploration probes more deeply into the environmental ethos that determines our attitude toward the environment.

Our capacity as the first among equal Bishops of the Orthodox Christian Church obliges us to offer a brief exposition of our faith concerning the environmental ethos in order to contribute to the formulation of a commonly acceptable environmental ethos, which may serve as a guide to further action.

It is a fact that the term "environment" presupposes someone encompassed by it. The two realities involved include, on the one hand, human beings as the ones encompassed, and, on the other hand, the natural creation as the one that encompasses. In our discussion, then, of our environmental ethos, we must clearly retain this distinction between nature as constituting the environment and humanity as encompassed by it.

We underline this point because it is widely held among certain ecologists that humanity is classified within the natural ecosystem, inasmuch as it is considered of equal significance with every other living being. This demotion of humanity, sometimes characterized as humility, constitutes a reaction against anthropocentric arrogance. This is due either to a complete rejection of God by human consciousness and the corollary divinization of humankind, or else to a misunderstanding of the divinely ordained

relation of humanity to the rest of creation, whereby humanity lords unrestrainedly and abusively over it. In both cases, the attitude towards nature is criminal and destructive, because humanity regards nature myopically and selfishly.

It is, therefore, appropriate and imperative to respond to and react against this attitude and ethos, especially when the wide-ranging and universally destructive consequences resulting from them have become the daily talk of the experts. Yet, it is not proper for the distinction between human beings and created nature (between the ones encompassed and the environment that encompasses) to be abolished in a way that equates humanity with the rest of the created beings.

The various proposals of this “deep ecology” have – whether admitted or not – no religious basis and lead to a passive attitude with regard to human disasters, which are explained as natural consequences of the ecological equilibrium. In this case, creation is rendered divine as a whole, and humanity’s unique position therein is not recognized, except with regard to the Creator’s action upon the environment.

The Orthodox Church assumes as its starting point the teaching of the Bible, accepted by the three great monotheistic religions, introducing a third factor in the relationship between humanity and the environment. This factor is the Creator of both humanity and the environment, who provides for all and has laid down the laws of harmonious coexistence of all elements in the universe, both animate and inanimate, endowing humankind with the mandate to serve as king of creation and the command to cultivate and preserve it.

Cultivating the environment implies collecting from nature all that is required for our material survival and spiritual growth. Preserving the environment involves the obligation to respect this divine gift and not to destroy it in order to fulfil its initial purpose responsibly and reasonably.

Let us concentrate on certain elements of this biblical account of the divinely ordained relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. The first noteworthy point is the restriction placed on the first-created not to consume of a certain fruit. Beyond serving as a basis for Christian asceticism, this commandment is a clear indication of environmental significance that the authority granted to humanity over nature is not absolute. While humanity was created to rule over the earth and all therein, it rules subject to restrictions and rules ordained by the Creator. Trespassing against these rules results in fatal consequences. The profound symbolism and extensive implications of this fact for an environmental ethos are apparent. Today we witness death approaching on account of trespassing against limits that God placed in our proper use of creation.

A second noteworthy point is that the gift of the paradise of delight to the first-created was accompanied by the commandment and responsibility of humanity “to work in it and to preserve it.” Working and preserving constitute a duty of active responsibility. Therefore, any principle of passivity or indifference toward environmental concerns cannot be regarded as sufficient or proper.

A third point, equally worthy of our attention, is that the consequences of the transgression of the first-created also had cosmic implications, rendering the earth cursed on account of their actions (cf. Ex. 3,17) and producing thorns and thistles in the environment. This rebellion incurred the gradual corruption and ultimate destruction of the ecological balance, which continues to this day, whenever we violate the

commandment of preservation and abstinence, proceeding instead to misuse and abuse the earth.

Finally, we should observe that the Creator also took special care during the great flood, so that through Noah, the plants, the clean animals that were directly useful to humanity as well as the unclean ones that appeared to be of no consequence, should be preserved from extinction. This divine concern constitutes a clear vindication of our interest in the survival of those living species that tend toward extinction.

Contemporary scientific research underlines the wide-ranging environmental consequences of human behavior in a particular time and specific place. This constitutes an experiential recognition of the religious truth that Adam and Eve's act of transgression wrought an important change and a fatal corruption for the entire world. This is not the result of a legal-ethical responsibility bequeathed to future generations, but of an irreparable disruption in the natural harmony. In a musical symphony, a single note of dissonance can destroy the entire performance; the only possible remedy is the repetition of the concert. In ecclesiastical terminology, this is called regeneration.

Roman Law recognized the absolute authority of a landlord over property. Yet, it stipulated certain restrictions concerning the disposal of unwanted materials, determined according to their usefulness and effectiveness. These principles should also govern the disposal of modern industrial wastes in relation to their detrimental impact on others.

Therefore, the entire universe constitutes one community and the actions of any single member affect every member of the community. The traditional Christian doctrine, both concerning the destructive evil committed by Adam, whereby corruption was introduced into the world, and the restorative good enacted by the new Adam, whereby new life was introduced into the world, provides a critical basis for the formulation of a new environmental ethos. Such an ethos is clearly warranted by the global impact of every behavior, both proper and improper.

The Saints have always taught that no one is saved alone and, therefore, that no one should strive for individual salvation but for the salvation of the whole world. Such a teaching is affirmed in the environmental field and confirmed by science. This conviction constitutes an essential aspect of the environmental ethos, required both of believers who rely on the precepts of faith and of those who wish to establish an ethos based on reason.

This concern for the salvation of all humanity and the preservation of all creation is translated into a merciful heart and sensitive attitude, so characteristically described by the seventh-century ascetic, Abba Isaac the Syrian. We are responsible not only for our actions, but also for the consequences of our interventions. After all, no responsible ruler leaves the growth of one's people unplanned and to the mercy of fate. Rather, a wise ruler assumes appropriate measures for the people's growth in accordance with specific goals. As ruler of creation, then, humanity is obliged to plan for its preservation and development. This requires the recruitment of scientific knowledge and involves the respect of all life, especially of the primacy of human life. It is precisely such a vision that also constitutes the fundamental criterion for any environmental ethos.

May we all prove worthy of our the anthropic identity.