

Theme 2 – A unity of Purpose: Environmental Ethics

Presentation: The Spirit of Love

Presenter: Archbishop Anastasios

A warm welcome to everyone who has come to this Symposium, "The Adriatic Sea: A Sea at Risk, A Unity of Purpose." May the Adriatic Sea be calm, our discussions fruitful, our proposals inspired and our decisions significant. We will have the opportunity to experience more intensely the Psalms when they say: "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Psalm 32/33:5). "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers" (Psalm 23/24:1-2).

This Symposium presents an exceptional variety of well known participants from various religious beliefs, scientific disciplines and professional involvement. We are all bound together by a deep concern and at1 active interest for the issues of the physical environment. We hope that the wealth of experience and knowledge, as well as that of spiritual and ethical presuppositions, which the distinguished participants represent, will help us proceed to fruitful discussion on our first topic: "Towards an Environmental Ethic." And more specific, to the questions: "Why is an ecological ethic needed? How can it be developed? How can it be applied?" It would be a very important step to come to an agreement on the basic principles of Environmental Ethics and to support one another in our struggle for a more consistent respect towards the environment; especially in relation to implementing these principles.

Since we are in Albania, let me connect this last point with some of the efforts of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. From March 2001 onward, the Foundation of the Orthodox Church, "Spirit of Love", in co-operation with the Departments of Biology of the Universities of Tirana, Athens and Thessaloniki, implemented a "Progran1ille for the protection of the environment and the formation of specialists." This program included:

- First, more than 1000 hours of training for 15 young Albanian scientists, who have completed degrees in biology, or forest and environmental engineering;
- Second, a study concerning the protection of the eco-system in the Zverec area, where a 14th century Orthodox monastery can be found, of the valley of the River Vjosa, one of the most unspoilt rivers of Europe, and of the Forest of Llogara;
- Third, a study of the problem of garbage management in the cities of Durres and Berat, as well as the organization of necessary work for environment protection (i.e. rehabilitation of places for garbage collection and disposal).

For the period 2002-2003, two projects are scheduled:

- An evaluation of the urban recyclable waste in a pilot area of Tirana;
- A "Green" project on the improvement of territories around primary schools in a pilot area in the periphery of Tirana -a good start for the environmental education of children who have grown up under difficulties.

Various people, both within Albania as well as abroad, wonder and ask why and how the Orthodox Church of Albania, who only eleven years ago lay in total ruins, and who even today continues to have urgent inner needs, can be so intensively involved in ecological projects. The answer is simple. An interest in the creation is an immediate duty for those who feel they have benefited from God; it is a consequence of an Orthodox self-consciousness.

The Horizon of Orthodoxy does not comprise only humankind. She has an immediate interest for the entire creation. Since the disturbance of the physical environment's equilibrium intensifies due to the careless actions of human beings, the Orthodox Church considers it her duty to invigorate -within her members and society in general- a sensitivity for the creation that suffers the worst exploitation of man's greed; to limit the consumer hysteria with a temperate "self-control" that forms an inseparable component of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), and to cultivate an effective respect for the physical environment, stressing unceasingly that this is the work of the Triune God, who reveals the sacredness and liturgical role that all creatures have.

Aiming at the development of an Orthodox consciousness concerning our ecological duty, all our festal messages for Christmas and Easter over the last decade include long references to the ecological dimension of the Orthodox feasts. We emphasize that, whether as humanity or as small groups, we have exploited nature too much through selfishness and narrow-mindedness. But also everyone of us has shown indifference, or even contempt for nature, polluting it in various ways. The more we realize the inexcusable injustice we do through our inactions, the sooner we will be reconciled with our physical environment.

Very vivid is our belief that the systematic cultivation of a religious conscience, with an evident respect for the natural environment, forms a basic element of our doxology and gratitude to the Creator of the universe.

The communion that we experience on this boat with representatives of various religions as well as the sciences and arts, reminds us that parallel with the area of truth -part of which is the truth related to natural phenomena- there exists within the reality of human life the dimension of beauty and goodness. And it does not seem that truth, beauty and goodness are completely separated from one another. I dare say, borrowing the words of a modern computer scholar, Professor Brian Cantwell Smith, that "Just as the physicists claim that gravity, charge, mass, etc., weren't separate in the first moments of the universe, I don't think God made the world with truth, beauty and goodness fully separated out, either." The Orthodox Church, with her word, her liturgy, and her entire existence, interweaves truth, beauty and goodness, stressing a majestic project of God for the world and humanity, which is completed by His creative and binding love.

The fact that our Symposium takes place on a boat traveling the Sea brings to mind a saying of the distinguished investigator of the bottom of the sea, Jacques Cousteau: "In the end, people protect only that which they truly love."

Let us proceed with the work of our Symposium, with much love towards the nature that surrounds us, with a special sensitivity -I would even dare to say love-toward the

beauty of the Adriatic coast, with manifest love for each of our fellow-travelers; and with more love for the Creator of the Universe, Who is the source of truth, beauty and goodness, and Who, in the New Testament is identified with love. I believe that in this way we strengthen our capacity towards creative thinking and general success in our Symposium that starts today.