

ECUMENICAL PRAYER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CREATION

HIS HOLINESS, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Notre Dame de Paris, 3 December 2015

Dear Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris,

Eminences,

Excellencies,

Dear Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches,

Dear Rector and members of the Chapter

Distinguished representatives of the civil authorities and of the city of Paris,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Introductory remarks by his eminence, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France

First of all, I want to apologize on behalf of His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in whose name I say these words. As you know, he was obliged to cancel his visit to France as well as his various commitments linked to COP 21. He deeply regrets not being able to be with us tonight, and wishes to express his sadness following the attacks in our city of Paris on the evening of 13 November 2015.

We offer our condolences to the victims, their families and all of the French people wounded by these terrible events. Our prayers are with you in these moments of great pain and uncertainty. We ask the Lord that he "may come to the rescue of those who are without assistance, be

hope for those without hope ...be All for all" as we say in the Divine Liturgy according to Saint Basil the Great.

Strong in our faith in God and our hope in the Lord, I offer you my most compassionate greetings, my warmest welcome for your presence here tonight, my most sincere encouragement for the indispensable commitment of each and every one of you working for environmental protection. At the heart of this wounded city, our prayer tonight must encompass the scars which mark our hearts and the whole of creation with the imprint of hatred. Faith is called upon to conquer fear. It should inspire us to take bold action in the world, for good and for the protection of the environment.

I am particularly pleased that this ecumenical prayer for the preservation of creation is being held, at the initiative of the Council of Christian Churches in France. Thanks also to his eminence, Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris, for hosting this prayer. Greetings as well to all the representatives of churches from other countries of the world who honour us with their presence.

As the Ecumenical Patriarchate never ceases to repeat with other Christians and especially with our brother, His Holiness, Pope Francis, the protection of the environment must be a common ecumenical goal. The prayer that we raise to the Lord this evening, while the principal leaders of the world are working to find an agreement to minimize climate change, is decisive in so many ways.

This prayer is not just a message for the attention of the political authorities, it is an essential spiritual commitment, as the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been proclaiming for decades. This gesture means that we transcend the artificial separation between that which belongs to the world and that which is sacred, thus making all a sacrament of the Kingdom. Thus we recognize the mark of the divine in all of creation. The image of God in humanity and the seal of the sacred in nature should move us to care for our world. In other words, the way we treat nature and the biodiversity of creation is directly related to the way we treat our neighbour.

Therefore, an ecological spirituality should be a spirituality of conversion. By conversion, we need to understand the transformation of the inner self as the starting point of an external change. Scientists

tirelessly emphasize the need for a radical change in our lifestyles in order to reduce the polluting activities that affect climate change. This is a reality that Christianity calls "*metanoia*", a reversal of the whole being. In the patristic tradition of the Desert Fathers – those seekers after the spiritual forged through centuries of ascetic experience – this *metanoia* encourages a clear sighted way of regarding humanity. It is precisely this vision that was envisaged by St. Isaac the Syrian, a mystic of the seventh century, who considered the goal of the spiritual life to be the acquiring "of a merciful heart that burns with love for all creation ... for all of God's creatures."

Such is the meaning of the effort expected of us today: to leave behind the selfishness into which the inertia of our habits made us fall, and discover the sober freedom that conversion of the heart brings with it, with the practice of fasting and prayer. In Christianity, creation is inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity. Questioning the same conditions of the human vocation, praying for creation places into perspective the conditions of our own salvation. Because time is unvaryingly directed towards the coming of the Kingdom, creation is a gift that was given to us freely and we will be held accountable, not only to the future generations but also to the Creator God who placed it in our hands.

The future of humanity will remain uncertain for as long as we are collectively unable to choose the common good. The multiple crises affecting the world today act like the distorting prism of our own irresponsibility. For those who are sceptical, we have to say that the environment is a whole that goes beyond the safeguarding of wildlife and flora. It is also a question of justice, solidarity, fraternity, in other words it is the constituent element of a humanism that needs to be rediscovered. As the prophet Micah wrote: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6: 8)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We particularly welcome this evening the many pilgrims who have crossed the whole of Europe, and those who have come from even further afield. We all are in our own way pilgrims, because this is an essential condition of being a Christian. However, by traveling thousands of kilometres, you have demonstrated a motivation and

courage which, we must recognize, sends a powerful message to the participants at COP 21. Your pilgrimage is in itself already a prayer.

Through prayer, we must learn to read the work of God in the book of nature and understand the interdependence between human beings and their environment. This is what we call an ecological spirituality. But we must go further and say the name of "God" when we speak of the created. Because according to the theological tradition of the Orthodox Church, there can be no spirituality that is beyond the reach of the transfiguring action of the Holy Spirit. Nature is inseparable from the free gift of creation by which God makes us responsible for its protection and its preservation. The gift of nature is the loving expression of a harmonious beauty which the divine is unable to contemplate being exhausted.

It is therefore our moral obligation to engage actively in favour of environmental protection as the manifestation of a Christian ethos that is non-negotiable with special interests. It is not too late to act, but we cannot allow ourselves to put off until tomorrow what we can do today. We are all in agreement about affirming the need to protect the natural resources of our planet that are neither infinite and even less commodities to be traded. The unity of humanity concerning the protection of creation, which we are calling for, at the same time obliges us to place our acts in accordance with our words. So to conclude with these words of the Apostle James: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? (...) faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

Let us therefore not remain alone!

Let us pray for the environment!

Let us act in its favour!

Provisional English translation from French