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THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
BARTHOLOMEW I AND ECOLOGY

CEMES PUBLICATIONS

Abstract

This paper aspires to explore the theological views of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and New Rome, Bartholomew I, for ecology, attempting to find out why he has demonstrated such care and interest for the environment, and how, from his perspective, the current ecological crisis could be overcome. Also, it would survey if and how he has contributed to the ecological debate within the World Council of Churches collaborating with the UN Environmental Program, to examine his theological impact in an international arena.

Keywords: Patriarch Bartholomew I, Ecology, World Council of the Churches, Orthodoxy, Ascetism, Metanoia

I. Introduction

“Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s Light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly, more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble it, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God’s intent. But repentance—words—without action are meaningless. As Christ says, “Many will call me ‘Lord, Lord’, but only those who do the will of my Father shall enter heaven”

Fyodor Michail Dostoevsky¹

It is common knowledge that our ecosystem is under pressure from human activities. Technological development and achievements have brought about a plethora of damages to the environment, leading our planet to a serious ecological crisis, and making its future rather uncertain and obscure. According to Stern Review², the NASA research³, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change⁴ and the Yale Forestry and Environmental Studies Project⁵-among others it is maintained that one of

¹F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazof* (Vol 1, Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1982), pp. 375-376.

²N. Stern, “Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change”, accessed in 30/5/2014, http://mudancasclimaticas.cptec.inpe.br/~rmclima/pdfs/destaques/sternreview_report_complet e.pdf. This report is written by Prof. Nicholas Stern, Chairman of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics (LSE), and of the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy at Leeds University and LSE, for the government of the United Kingdom, and according to Francis Cairncross, this is the most well-known report of its kind. The First Post, "Time to get Stern on climate change", accessed in 30/5/2014, <http://www.theweek.co.uk/index.php? menuID=2&subID=1055>.

³NASA, “Global Climate Change”, accessed in 30/5/2014, <http://climate.nasa.gov/causes>.

⁴Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed in 30/5/2014, <http://www.ipcc.ch>.

⁵Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, “Yale Forestry and Environmental Studies Project”, accessed in 30/5/2014, <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/projects/research/>.

the most dangerous threats to our ecosystem is climate change. Some of the consequences of this anthropogenic impact on our environment are the rise of the global temperature of up to 4.5°C⁶, a depletion of freshwater resources, deforestation, desertification, rising sea level and reduction of biodiversity⁷. Because of this obvious threat to the environment, there are several arguments of diverse perspectives aimed at protecting the environment. For instance, economists articulate positive statements of nature maintaining that it shall be protected, because there may be species of fauna and flora which could be used for financial reasons in the future, when and if scientists would know more about them⁸. Some scientists state that we need to ensure the welfare of the environment, because our knowledge about it is quite limited, and therefore it should be protected for future scientific study (e.g. insects living in tropical rain forests)⁹. For aesthetic reasons, it is deemed that ecosystem should be protected, because it beautifies human life, and promotes quality¹⁰.

This thesis will highlight the arguments of Orthodox theology for the preservation of *κτίσις* (i.e. creation), focusing in particular on the contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and New Rome, Bartholomew I, to the ecological debate.

To be specific, this work aspires to answer some important questions on the theological perspective of Bartholomew I on ecology. With this discussion in mind, this thesis primarily explores how Bartholomew interprets Orthodox theology to justify his active role in the protection of the environment, to examine the “roots of evil” of the ecological crisis and to suggest solutions which would help overcome this problem. Furthermore, this thesis details his contribution to ecological debates within the World Council of Churches (WCC). The ways that

⁶S. McFague, *A New Climate For Theology*, (Minneapolis:Fortress Press, 2008), p. 10.

⁷Ecocrete, «Αντιμετώπιση Παγκόσμιων Περιβαλλοντικών Ζητημάτων» (“Confronting Global Environmental Issues”), accessed in 19/5/2014, http://www.ecocrete.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4477. For further information concerning the human impact on nature, vide: A. Goudie, *The Human Impact on the Natural Environment* (Fourth Edition. Oxford:Blackwell Publishers, 1993). This book was written twenty-one years ago, but it can provide scientifically-based extensive analysis on a plethora of problems that humans can trigger to nature; this data shan’t consider out-dated, because these problems still remain despite the technological advance since then.

⁸Goudie, *The Human Impact on the Natural Environment*, 382.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

Bartholomew has influenced the WCC are highlighted, in particular how he has used theology in statements addressed to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences¹¹, where representatives of all countries of the United Nations take decisions on environmental issues. Regarding the originality of this thesis, the author, based on primary sources, and in particular, on a selective number of statements made by Bartholomew (patriarchal encyclicals, texts from official lectures, etc.) and the WCC, the valuable books of John Chryssavgis—the advisor of Bartholomew in environmental issues— *Cosmic Grace and Humble Prayer: An Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I* (2003) and *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (2012), as well as on secondary sources (selective number of bibliography related to the Orthodox position on environmental issues), will focus exclusively on the relation of the Orthodox theology with ecology through the eyes of Bartholomew I, and, secondarily, if and how his theological understanding of the creation has influenced the World Council of Churches to consider it for its discussion with the United Nations Environmental Program.

In the end, with respect to the structure of this article, the first chapter will survey the history of the ecological activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (before Bartholomew), as well as the major initiatives and activities of Bartholomew, while the second chapter – on which the author has given more emphasis – will be dedicated to the theology of Bartholomew I on ecology, answering the following two questions: why is the protection of the environment an important issue for the Orthodoxy, and what measures can be taken in order to heal most of the environmental problems? The third and last chapter will focus specifically on the contribution of the current Ecumenical Patriarch to the environmental debate within the World Council of Churches (WCC).

¹¹The UNFCCC is a part of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), which, as officially states, strives “to be the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimensions of sustainable development within the United Nations system and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment”. Vide the official website of the UNEP: United Nations Environment Program, accessed in 19/5/2014, <http://www.unep.org/About>.