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## **The Ecological Efforts of the ‚Green Patriarch‘**

### *Ekološka prizadevanja ‚zelenega patriarha‘*

*Abstract:* The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, started very early to deal with the issues of ecology and he also engaged in many different activities entwined with ecology and environment protection. In this area of public activity, one can clearly observe the continuity of endeavours of the patriarch Bartholomew, who has shown interest in the field of environmental preservation when he was an associate of the patriarch Demetrius. This interest in ecology became even more evident when he continued to work in this area after being elected as patriarch. Bartholomew recognised the ecological necessities, and he uses different ways to invite and encourage the others to develop acumen and sensitivity toward the care for the environment where we live, always accentuating that this is a call to which we all are invited to respond, that the emergence of the ecological crisis is a responsibility of everyone. Due to his many efforts in the area of ecology, Bartholomew was given the title of the ‚green patriarch‘.

*Keywords:* ecology, orthodox theology, ‚green patriarch‘, Constantinople, ecumenical, Bartholomew

*Povzetek:* Konstantinopelski ali ekumenski patriarh Bartolomej se je ekologiji začel posvečati zelo zgodaj. Vključen je v različne dejavnosti, povezane z ekologijo in varstvom narave. Na tem področju javnega delovanja je v prizadevanjih patriarha Bartolomeja, ki se je za ohranjanje narave zanimal že, ko je bil pomočnik patriarha Demetrija, mogoče opaziti jasno kontinuiteto. Zanimanje za ekologijo je postalo še vidnejše po njegovi izvolitvi za patriarha – Bartolomej je prepoznal nujnost zavzemanja za ekologijo. Pri tem uporablja različne načine, s katerimi druge ljudi vabi, spodbuja k razvijanju zavesti, občutljivosti in skrbnosti za okolje, v katerem živimo. Vseskozi poudarja, da gre za klic, na katerega smo povabljeni odgovoriti vsi – pojav ekološke krize je odgovornost vsakogar. Zaradi njegovih številnih prizadevanj na področju ekologije se je Bartolomeja prijel vzdevek ‚zeleni patriarh‘.

*Ključne besede:* ekologija, pravoslavna teologija, ‚zeleni patriarh‘, Konstantinopel, ekumenski, Bartolomej

## 1. Introduction

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The ecological crisis and environment protection are topics that encompass the entire humanity, and all share the responsibility for the habitat in which they live, and we also carry the burden for its preservation. Having this in mind, interest in ecology issues also includes different scientific areas which strive to preserve the environment in which humanity dwells. Therefore, engagement in the field of ecology within the interdisciplinary approach bluntly shows the seriousness of the problem with which humanity has to deal with. One can assert that contemporary ecology »is one of the most characteristic expressions of human interest concentrated on practical goals« (Bartholomew 2012a, 65). The gravity of ecology issues and ecological problems is a point of interest even for the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew. The patriarch Bartholomew is one of the most prominent advocates of environment preservation who comes from the world of Orthodox theologians. For this reason, in the rest of the article, we will try to explore more closely his activities in the area of ecology, primarily by examining some of the key elements of his theological endeavours.

## 2. The Activities of the Ecumenical Patriarch

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It is a well-known fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is an honorary title for the patriarchate of Constantinople. Therefore, by using the title of the 'Ecumenical Patriarchate' one intends to symbolically point out the precedence of the patriarchate of Constantinople among the other Orthodox patriarchates. One can also freely claim that the present patriarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Bartholomew stands out for some of his endeavours, and our attention will focus on these, that is, the ecological activities of this patriarch. We will not expound on his biography or present all the enterprises and initiatives he completed as a patriarch. Nevertheless, we intend to show his activity in the field of ecology because it was exactly him to be the first among the patriarchs to deal with this problem which concerns the life of everyone.

In the context of efforts that deal with the assertion of Orthodox theologians dealing with ecology, it is definitely necessary to mention his interest in environmental issues expressed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is a matter of fact that, within the ecumenical patriarchate, the interest in the activities connected with ecology and environmental issues was stimulated by the article written by the American historian Lynn White back in 1967. (White 1967, 1203–1207; Zizioulas 2013, 63–64). From this period, we can clearly discern different efforts made by this patriarchate in the field of ecological challenges. »Whether we are speaking about economy or ecology, from the perspective of the Ecumenical Patriarchate it is important to recognize that this world is our 'home' – which is precisely what the Greek root *oikos*, or the prefix *eco-*, implies. This world is the home of everyone and of all creation.« (Bartholomew 2010, 67) The care for preserving the cre-

ation is most surely one of the patriarch Bartholomew's main and central activities (Chryssavgis 2018, 186). This fact will be accentuated later on different occasions by the patriarch Bartholomew himself: »for many years now, the Orthodox Ecumenical Throne has devoted itself to the service of protection of the environment.« (Bartholomew 2012e, 111) This type of effort will be especially visible in a specific way during the period of his service as the patriarch of Constantinople.

## 2.1 ‚The Green Patriarch‘

Already one month after he was elected as patriarch, in May of 1991, he started to deal with the ecological issues and launched several initiatives in this area. However, a certain interest in the field of environment protection and some ventures in this area existed even before he was elected as patriarch (Maros 2017, 151–157). Particular interest and care for the environment by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew can be traced from 1968 when the Ecumenical Patriarchate was led by the patriarch Demetrius, a predecessor of the patriarch Bartholomew (Chryssavgis, 2007, 10; Maros, 2017, 151). In this way, one can observe the appearance of a defined ecological vision, as the initiatives and ventures of the patriarch Bartholomew reach as far as the period when he was not elected as the patriarch, all the way to 1986, when he organised the Pre-Synod Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, from October 28<sup>th</sup> till November 6<sup>th</sup> 1986 (Chryssavgis 2012b, 4).

Patriarch Demetrius published on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1989 the encyclical, where, at the beginning of the new liturgical year, he encouraged prayer for the protection and preservation of the environment and all of creation (Dimitrios 2012, 23–25). In this way, near the end of the service of the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrius, and before the start of the office of his heir, the Holy Synod in Constantinople had declared September 1, 1989, the *Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* (Gnavi 2016, 17). This will prove to be very important, not only for the Patriarchate of Constantinople but also for the whole of Orthodoxy. What happened was that later (in 1991), this Day was acknowledged by all the Orthodox churches, and in this process, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew played a significant role (Chryssavgis 2013, 154; Gnavi 2016, 17). In this manner, care for creation and the responsibility for the environment in which humanity lives was demonstrated by the Orthodox churches.

Furthermore, let us mention here that the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew gained numerous important recognitions because of his accomplishments and results in the ecological field. After all, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew received the very title of the ‚green patriarch‘ exactly because of his initiatives and efforts conducted in the area of preservation of nature. This title was formally granted to him in 1997 in the United States of America in the White House, and this is just one of the many signs of recognition and acknowledgement of his efforts and initiatives in the field of ecology (Chryssavgis 2012b, 4–15).

The present Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has travelled more than any other Orthodox patriarch (Chryssavgis 2018, 218), from the very beginning of

his service, was very active in this field of public presence, mainly because of his efforts regarding the protection of the environment in which humanity dwells. As was said, due to his activities and commitment to the care of creation, he was named the ‚green patriarch‘ (Gnavi 2016, 16–17).<sup>1</sup> It is meaningful to observe that in this context, the Head of the Department for Orthodox theology of the John Paul II Ecumenical Institute of the University in Lublin, Krzysztof Leśniewski, speaks about the ‚green vocation‘ of the patriarch Bartholomew, pointing out the particular contributions of the ‚green patriarch‘ and his efforts in relation to environment protection (Leśniewski, 2011, 34–37).

## 2.2 Ecological Initiatives and Efforts

Let us mention here some of the notable activities of the patriarch Bartholomew that involve his solicitude in ecological issues, all those initiatives and enterprises that he has undertaken, and which are connected with ecological arguments. As early as 1991, only a month after being elected as patriarch, on the island of Crete, he organised a lecture on the topic concerning ecology (Chryssavgis 2018, 169–171). In his posterior activities patriarch Bartholomew organised courses and conferences on the themes interwoven with ecology. In the context of mentioning ecological activities, let us add that patriarch Bartholomew’s contribution to the World Council of the Churches is also well-known (Maros 2017, 169–174).

He also initiated the organisation of the ecological summer courses in the Halki School of Theology, which were held every year during the summer in the period from 1994 till 1998. There were five summer courses on Halki that were held in total, and the themes were: ‚The Environment and Religious Education‘, ‚The Environment and Ethics‘, ‚The Environment and Communication‘, ‚The Environment and Justice‘, and ‚The Environment and Poverty‘ (Chryssavgis 2012b, 4–15; Maros 2017, 155). It seems that his efforts were positively received and that the general reception was also affirmative, a fact which is corroborated by numerous awards and recognitions that were granted to him (Chryssavgis 2018, 170–171).

One should especially emphasize the symposiums about water, which will be elaborated on in more detail later on because they are extremely important in patriarch Bartholomew’s overall ecological efforts. The mentioned symposiums were very well perceived even by the wider public and the media (for example, *the New York Times*, *the BBC*, *the Independent*, etc.) (Chryssavgis 2018, 180). This is the reason why, in 1994, on the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, we could witness the foundation of the Religious and Scientific Committee, an institution that served Patriarch Bartholomew as a conduit to organise eight symposiums dedicated to rivers and seas (Maros 2017, 155–157).

<sup>1</sup> In this sense the Italian author Marco Gnavi, in the preface of the book *Una casa chiamata terra*, claims that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: »is universally known for his commitment for environment protection, and therefore deserves the title of the ›green‹ patriarch.« (Chryssavgis, 2007, 9–18; Chryssavgis 2017; Gnavi, 2016, 16–17; Leśniewski, 2011, 33–48)

### 3. The Preservation of Water as the Source of Life

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In his role as the main spiritual authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, patriarch Bartholomew often invites and encourages others to uphold and care for the protection of the environment and he also accentuates the role of religion in the world events (Bartholomew 2015). Among many things, patriarch Bartholomew points out: »We are called to work in humble harmony with creation and not in arrogant supremacy against it.« (2012g, 97) However, he is also well aware that religion cannot resolve the problems of ecology and the pending environmental crisis without science. Hence, he has endeavoured to realise his plans and efforts connected with the care for the environment by cooperating with plentiful and various scientists. Therefore, it is imperative that everybody acts in their respective field of study to safeguard the environment in which humanity dwells (Chryssavgis 2018, 173). This was the reason why patriarch Bartholomew, within the project named „Religion, Science and Environment“, organises symposiums concerning water. These symposiums were remembered mainly because a host of scientists, theologians, politicians and many others have fruitfully participated in them (171–172).

The symposiums about water were held in the period from 1995 to 2009 (172–180). It is interesting to observe that patriarch Bartholomew did not choose by accident the said topic regarding water. Moreover, he initiated and inspired all the organisations precisely dedicated to this topic, to wit about water as the source of life. In this way, John Chryssavgis, in his role as the theological advisor of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for environmental issues, interprets the organisation of the symposiums dedicated to water in terms of patriarch Bartholomew’s persistence, considering that the patriarch is convinced that »the defence of the environment makes an integral part of his ministry as a priest« (174) and that this is the context and spirit in which the patriarch acts according to the purpose of environment preservation.

In this manner, with the initiative of patriarch Bartholomew and the sponsorship of Ms. Maria Becket, significant symposiums about water were held, dealing with the pending issues of the world water systems (Maros 2017, 169). Contemporary management of water once again demands the expansion of the concept of ethics of ecology, the care for water, responsible and rational usage of water, etc. (Chryssavgis 2018, 172). In this context patriarch Bartholomew points out: »Water should never be regarded as private property or become a tool or purpose of personal interests.« (172) However, rational spending and resource usage are not connected to water alone: »The rationalism of this utilitarian mentality is perhaps the only answer that ecologists can provide to this question.« (Bartholomew 2012a, 66) It is important to have a conscience about the limited and rational consumption of goods and natural resources. In this sense, »Ecologists demand a limited and controlled use of natural environment, a quantitative reduction that will allow its longer use by humanity. They seek a rational limitation of our limitless use of nature. Therefore, they seek a more rational application of the rational system that is already exploiting nature.« (67)

### 3.1 The Care for the Preservation of Water

The importance of the initiatives and efforts that regard the safekeeping of nature, and also the significance of symposiums that patriarch Bartholomew organised, can be observed in the testimony written by one of his close associates John Chryssavgis:

»I have personally witnessed and saw the manner in which the patriarch Bartholomew, especially during the period of the international symposium, used every opportunity to visit the local Orthodox dignitaries, and to gently but also at the same time decisively obtain their understanding and support in the care for the natural habitat. The international symposium has really had a practical and symbolical value for visible unity of the Orthodox churches.« (2018, 20)

When it comes to the issue of the consideration of the Ecumenical Patriarch for the preservation of water and the realisation of the symposium about water, then one needs, in a special way, to single out the previously mentioned symposiums about water that were held in relation to the topic of the status of the world water heritage, paying attention to rivers and seas. In this way, the first in the line of many symposiums, held on the initiative and organised by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, was dedicated to the topic of the Aegean Sea. This symposium took place in 1995 under the following heading: „The Apocalypse and The Environment“. In turn, this was precisely the topic that initiated the very series of symposiums dedicated to water. The second symposium was continued in September of 1997 and was named: „The Black Sea in Crisis“ (174). The symposium about the Black Sea remained very remarkable because of the fact that it was one of the direct results of the work of the Halki Institute of Ecology, which deals with the scientific exploration and solving of problems stemming from the pollution of the Black Sea. This symposium was marked by the great contribution of this Institute (Bartholomew 2012i, 166–170). One may claim that the same topic was elaborated, at least in some sort of way, even in the third symposium dedicated to water, titled: „The River of Life: from the Danube to the Black Sea“ (Chryssavgis 2018, 174–175). On the occasion of the opening of the third symposium, located in Turkey, Bartholomew said: »To ensure the furtherance of natural life, we consider ascetic self-denial to be necessary and the reduction of many material pleasures to be beneficial.« (2012b, 79–84)

By continuing to organise symposiums about water, patriarch Bartholomew advanced to regulate the fourth water symposium as well, where the topic was the Adriatic Sea. This symposium was concluded in Venice in 2002, and its title was given as „The Adriatic Sea: a Sea at Risk – Unity of Purpose“ (Chryssavgis 2018, 175). One of the important fruits of this symposium was the stipulation of the Declaration between the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. This agreement also has an ecumenical aspect, and we may claim that this declaration had marked the fourth symposium dedicated to water. The importance of this agreement is even greater if one con-

siders that it is the first agreement between the leaders of the Western and Eastern Church achieved on the topic of ecology, expressing the care for our common home (John Paul II and Bartholomew I., 2002; Chryssavgis 2018, 176).

Furthermore, patriarch Bartholomew continued with the symposiums concerning water by realising the fifth one had gathered more than 250 participants. This Symposium was organised in 2003, and it was named „The Baltic Sea: Common Heritage, Shared Responsibility“ (Chryssavgis 2018, 176–177).

July of 2006 was the time when the sixth symposium regarding water was held, titled „The River Amazon, Source of Life“. Amazon is one of the longest rivers and also one of the richest in water supply (Chryssavgis, 2018, 177–178; Benedict XVI., 2006). On the occasion of this symposium Patriarch Bartholomew, in his homily during the blessing of the river Amazon, declared: »In blessing the waters of the great Amazon, we proclaim our belief that environmental protection is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem that concerns all of us. The initial and crucial response to the environmental crisis for everyone is to bear personal responsibility for the way that we live, the values that we cherish and the priorities that we pursue.« (Bartholomew 2012f, 283)

Notable was the title of the seventh symposium about the Arctic Ocean, titled „The Arctic, Mirror of Life“ (Chryssavgis 2018, 178–179). Lastly, let us mention the eighth, and at the same time, the final in the series of symposiums dedicated to water, held in October of 2009, named: „The Establishment of the Equilibrium: the Great Mississippi“ (179–180).

By looking back at this series of symposiums about water, we may notice that they all contained the theme regarding the main water surfaces of the world, that is, the rivers and seas. This scientific, theological and spiritual contribution is definitely important in the contemporary era, the time of the ecological crisis, and it might be said that we are all invited to stand up for the preservation of creation.

#### **4. Some Theological Points that Regard Ecology**

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In the spiritual and theological context, it is important to pinpoint the relevance of the prayer for the environment and everything created: »The Church which forgets to pray for the environment is the Church which refuses to offer drink or food to humanity in need.« (Bartolomeo 2016, 64–65) In this context, as we have already mentioned, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1989, patriarch Demetrios established the Day of the Protection of the Environment. It is the first day of the ecclesiastical year, and, at the same time, it also highlights the importance of prayer for creation. As he explained in his encyclical, on that day, »we invite through this, Our Message for the entire Christian world, to offer together with the Mother Great Church of Christ, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, every year on this day, prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and in petition for its protection and salvation« (Dimitrios 2012, 25).

Looking at patriarch Bartholomew's theological reasoning, we may claim that two fundamental arguments attest to his care for the ecology. Here we may first point out the creation issue, where everything that was created belongs to the Lord, and humanity's task is to take care of the created world. Furthermore, we notice that God is creating again in the *New Adam* and returns the 'ancient beauty' (Maros 2017, 158).

#### 4.1 'Liturgical' and 'ascetic' ethos

As is the case with many other Orthodox theologians, patriarch Bartholomew also keeps his own biblical and theological postulates which are then applied in his theological endeavours (Bartholomew 2012c, 88–89; 2012d 93–95). Moreover, it is from his theological convictions that he is taking directions for actions to protect the habitat in which humanity lives. However, patriarch Bartholomew also provides a new vision of the word by emphasizing the 'spirit of Eucharist' and the 'ascetic ethos' (Bartolomeo 2016, 72). When speaking about the economic but also the ecological crisis of the modern world, and by invoking the teachings of his predecessor, patriarch Demetrius, patriarch Bartholomew indicates that »our Church insightfully emphasized the significance of the eucharistic and ascetic ethos of tradition« (Bartholomew 2012j, 63).

Furthermore, patriarch Bartholomew here underlined the fact that the monastic and ascetic traditions have great importance and significance for Orthodox theology when we are talking about the environment and the ecological crisis happening today (2012h, 216–217). In this context, the ascetic tradition also provides a new perspective of self-limitation within a system of sustainable living, a fact which actually indicates the potential of the ecological way of life (Theokritoff 2009, 93–116). When referring to ecological ascetism today, the contemporary Orthodox theologian Elizabeth Theokritoff said: »The ascetic tradition offers a radically new perspective on self-limitation, on the sort of restrictions on our range of options that a sustainable way of living is likely to demand. Such limitations are neither a way of making ourselves miserable, nor an occasion to feel self-righteous.« (113)

This is the reason why patriarch Bartholomew is convinced that humanity should return to the 'eucharist' and 'ascetic' way of life, and these notions must be studied in the Church, thus enabling humanity to become even more conscious and grateful to the Lord for all of creation (Bartolomeo 2016, 37–46). In this sense, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople points out: »We believe that by our *unique liturgical and ascetic ethos*, the spiritual teaching of the Orthodox Church is able to provide an important theoretical and deontological instruction for the care of our planet Earth.« (2012e, 111) In this manner patriarch Bartholomew connects spirituality and the environment: emphasizing spiritual values in the very definition of environment ethics (Leśniewski, 2011, 33–34).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, along with the research it entails, we were directed primarily to the ecological efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. This does not represent the total oeuvre of his work and activities, but it may provide a new perspective and vision in caring for the safekeeping of the created world. One of the key topics in this area is definitely water as the source of life. In fact, this topic was the main theme of eight international and interdisciplinary symposiums, which were noted not only in the Orthodox world but also in the broader global arena. This type of research and the participation of various scientists in the mentioned symposiums open up new possibilities for even greater campaigns with many people, thus participating in the care for the conservation of nature.

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