

In Memoriam Elias Crisostomo Abramides



Elias Crisostomo Abramides, an active delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the World Council of Churches since 1990, suddenly passed away in Buenos Aires on 21 October 2019. He was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in a Greek Orthodox family. Licentiate in Chemical Sciences from the University of Buenos Aires, orientated to Environmental Protection Studies, he was since 1991 a commissioner and an advisor of the WCC. He co-founded the WCC Working Group on Climate Change of which he was co-moderator, and was designated as WCC contact person to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). He was also Executive Secretary of the Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches in Argentina and a member of the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom. He was a speaker on “Religious Approaches to Climate Change” in the 2018 G20 Interfaith Forum meeting in Buenos Aires. His conferences, lectures, articles and statements written at local and international levels were mainly centred on climate change and protection of Creation from the justice, ethical and historical standpoint. We reproduce here his last contribution to the July-August 2019 issue of *Enimerosis*, the Newsletter of the Permanent Representation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the WCC. May his memory be eternal!

THE ETHICS OF HUMAN ACTIONS: REFLEXIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

By Lic. Elias Crisostomo Abramides

In 2019 we commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter of Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios establishing the Day of Prayer for Creation, where he proclaimed through his Patriarchal Message, the entire Christian world to offer together with the Ecumenical Patriarchate every year on 1 September, prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation.

He based his decision on the abusive human activities leading Creation to the verge of apocalyptic self-destruction, either in the form of the pollution of nature dangerous for all living beings, causing the extinction of many species of the animal and the plant world, and even menacing human beings in various other forms of destruction, mainly environmental.

The Day of Prayer for Creation is now commemorated worldwide by the World Council of Churches and its member churches and since 2015 by the Roman Catholic Church after Pope Francis' proclamation.

To start reflecting on the deep significance of a word is unquestionably vital to start from the etymology of the word expressing a certain concept. The significance of the word "*ethics*" comes from far in the cultures of the world. The origin of the word is Greek: "ETHIKI", is derived from the Greek word "ETHOS": the characteristic spirit, genius or disposition of peoples, communities, institutions. Its Latin translation is "ETHICA". This example shows us the importance the issue has had for the ancient classical cultures. The concept itself generated enough concern in those societies as to impel them to 'create' a word to define it.

Ethics refers to the chapter of philosophy that relates to the morals and the obligations of men and women, understanding by morals the science that "*deals with goodness in general, and with the human actions in order to assess their goodness (kindness) or their maliciousness*".

We mentioned "human actions". On this matter there exists a classical distinction between a "man or woman action" and a "human action". A man or woman actions are for instance to eat or to read or write. But to eat, read or write in a specific way are "human actions"; they are part of a culture, its intelligence, its will and its freedom. It is this freedom that makes us distinguish right from good or evil.

Ethics study the way a person acts, and judges it from its kindness or maliciousness. The same process occurs in the environmental field. "Bioethics" judges the actions of human beings in this field.

Before God talked to us through the Prophets, the Patriarchs, the Psalms and the Gospels, his first communication was made through His wonderful Creation. Thus, Creation was the first tangible proof of God's revelation.

The "*very good Creation of God*" was treated in an entirely wrong way based on the mandate: "*Subdue the Earth*" (Genesis 1: 26-28). This mandate established the relationship between human beings and Creation.

Here we find two verbs that are central for our analysis: "*dominate*", that comes from the Hebrew word "*radah*", and "subdue" which is the translation of the Hebrew word "*kabas*". The deep sense of the terms given by God is very different of what was understood and proclaimed.

The first term "*dominate*" refers to the hierarchical order of Creation where the human being "*created to the image and likeness of God*" is the ruler, thus being His most perfect act of creation. However, human beings have to decide in the name of God to whom they have to account for their own actions.

The second verb, "*subdue*", refers to the action of taking possession of a territory to inhabit it and take care of it. But not to walk over it, using it carelessly only taking profit from it, and then polluting it, destroying it and abandoning it.

God gives his very good Creation for humanity to live in it, and makes men and women responsible to keep its perfect order. Creation is a gift given to us in an immense act of God's Love. We are allowed to enjoy its beauty and wonderful bounties, but humanity has the duty to care for it, to protect it, improving it and taking it to its full plenitude. Actions that improve its plenitude are ethically right. Actions that interfere or inhibit its plenitude are ethically wrong because human beings are not caring for or preserving Creation.

Therefore it is very clear that there exists only one type of ethics: it is impossible to modify moral rules according to our own desire and convenience, either as persons, societies or countries, without considering our neighbours, our brothers and sisters. This is not what we should do as Christians. What was right yesterday cannot be wrong today, and right again the following day. Ethics are permanent, unchangeable, and impossible to be shaped to our personal conveniences.

Anthropogenic climate change, produced by human activities since the industrial revolution, has polluted and increasingly and continuously pollutes the Earth's atmosphere, surpassing all the mitigation and adaptation actions taken to reduce its global impact. Life itself is jeopardised on our blue planet. Climate change creates desertification, lack of food, lack of water, thus creating poverty; climate-based population displacements around the world; melting of the ice-mantles in the North Pole, in the South Pole located on the Antarctic continent; in Greenland;

melting of glaciers; and causes sea level rise in coastal areas and inhabited small islands and atolls around the world.

At present we are discussing completely different intentions that inspired the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which was signed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The first UN Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC met in Berlin in 1995, after the Convention entered into force in 1994. Also the 2015 Paris Agreement's first intentions seem weakened after four years of poor actions and major delays.

To conclude these reflections I have chosen two quotations that I consider central in our efforts and deeds in order to respect, to protect and to love the 'very good Creation of God'.

The first passage is called "*Love all God's Creation*", written by the important Russian Orthodox religious writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) in his novel: "*The Brothers Karamazov*". The beauty and simplicity of his writing is inspiring and full of love for God and His Creation:

"Love all God's Creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, and love each separate thing. If thou love each thing thou wilt perceive the mystery of God in all; and when once thou perceive this, thou wilt thenceforward grow every day to a fuller understanding of it: until thou come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal."

And to put a heartfelt and proper end to these reflexions let us remember once more the imposing words of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during the consultation in Santa Barbara, USA, which took place as far back as 1997:

"... We call on the world's leaders to take action to halt the destructive changes to the global climate that are being caused by human activity. And we call on all of you here today, to join us in this cause. This can be our important contribution to the great debate about climate change. We must be spokespeople for an ecological ethic that reminds the world that it is not ours to use for our own convenience. It is God's gift of love to us and we must return his love by protecting it and all that is in it."

- Source: ecupatria.org