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Greeting of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity” (Karlsruhe, Germany, September 1, 2022)



Distinguished organizers and delegates,

Beloved participants and stewards of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches,

Dear friends, brothers and sisters,

One of the core beliefs and central teachings of Christianity through the centuries is the conviction that the light of Christ shines more brightly than any darkness in

our hearts and in our world. We Christians affirm and declare that the joy of the resurrection radiates through and prevails over the suffering of the cross. This is what we maintain; this is what we preach; and this is what we proclaim to the whole world. Indeed, “if Christ had not been raised from the dead, then our message is meaningless and our faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15.14). This is surely the underlying premise and focus of the theme of this assembly, which professes that “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”

Yet, even as we look around, we are obliged to confess that we have not practiced – and continue to fall short of – what we have preached over twenty centuries. How can we reconcile our magnificent faith with our manifest failure?

The answer lies in the scriptural passage for this morning’s plenary, which takes place on September 1st, the day that Orthodox Christians since 1989 have dedicated to praying for the protection of God’s gift of creation and when Christians of all confessions and communions commit to advancing the ministry of creation care. In the Letter to the Colossians (1, 19–20), we read that: “In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether in heaven or on earth, making peace by the blood of the cross”.

This passage assumes a fundamental difference between the secular and a spiritual worldview. The person with a secular mentality feels that he or she is the center of the universe. By contrast, the person with a sacred mentality considers the center of the universe to be elsewhere and in others.

A spiritual worldview suggests an enlarged – a broader or ecumenical – worldview, one that is centered and balanced in Christ as the heart of the universe. This is what provides the source of reconciliation and assurance of transformation. By perceiving the world through this lens of cosmic transfiguration and transformation, we are capable of embarking – as individuals and as society – on restoring the shattered image of creation, a process that begins with and involves acknowledging responsibility for the sin of ignoring the divine presence in all things and in all people. The entire universe – all of creation – constitutes a cosmic liturgy. When we are initiated into the mystery of the Resurrection and transformed by the light of the Transfiguration, then we are able to discern and detect the purpose for which God has created everyone and everything.

There is a need for cosmic repentance and cosmic resurrection. What is required is nothing less than a radical reversal of our perspectives and practices. “The blood of the cross” in the above apostolic reference reveals and indicates a way out of our impasses by proposing self-criticism and self-sacrifice as solutions to self-

centeredness. “The blood of the cross” provides a way of assuming responsibility for our actions and our world. We should all adopt a spirit of humility and appreciate the world as larger than ourselves. We should never reduce our religious life to ourselves and our own interests. We should always recall our vocation to transform all of God’s creation.

Still, the greatest threat to our planet is not the novel coronavirus but climate change. The growing but neglected toll from rising global temperatures will actually eclipse the current number of deaths from all the infectious diseases combined if climate change is not constrained. In the wake of the pandemic, even the World Economic Forum called for “a great reset” of capitalism, arguing that sustainability will only be achieved through drastic lifestyle changes. This is what we have described as the need for repentance (or metanoia) from indiscriminate habits and destructive practices toward other people and in relation to nature’s resources.

Dear brothers and sisters,

If we are to make any change in our priorities and lifestyles, we must do so together – as churches and communities, as societies and nations. We must “bear one another’s burdens if we wish to fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6.2). And here, let us call to mind the current war and unjust suffering of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. Above all, then, we must pledge our repentance and the conversion of our hearts and lives. Today is “the right opportunity” (Is. 49.8), “the acceptable time and the day of salvation.” “The time to act for the Lord is now” (Ps. 119.126).

This is our fervent prayer for all of you in the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches on this consecrated day of prayer and protection for God’s sacred creation.

photo: N.Papachristou / Ecumenical Patriarchate

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