

THE OIKOS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

A Common Responsibility of Religions¹

1. First of all, I would like to express to you, how deeply moved I felt the moment I set foot on the ground of this country. I think that there are places and countries where one can feel and behave simply as a tourist. While in other places, in other countries, one can't help but feel like a pilgrim. Moreso, when those places are "theobadistoi" (where God has walked). When the words of the prophet and the ascetic strike your conscience with the same violence that wounds your face from the grains of sand coming from the desert's windstorm. When memorials of the struggles of generations and generations, whose lives encouraged tremendous visions and great ideas, crush laughingly your indolence. Memorials that witness the greatness of man when he interferes with History as creator of great deeds and of skilled craftsmanship, works of art and word, wisdom and reflection, holiness and faith. But also ruins that reveal the tragedy of man, when he is overcome by the spirit of indifference or by the craziness for destruction. Definitely, we are in a region of the world where you can pass by nothing without a message of it touching your conscience, without some memory of it bringing pain to your heart.

2. Luckily, there are also some memories, some experiences far away, that return like a balsam in the feeling of transiency. Allow me a personal confession. During the German Occupation of my own homeland, Crete (1941-1945), our village was a center of resistance. It is located on the southwest coast of Crete, across from Egypt, with whom we had practically continuous communication. My childhood experiences of that time now come back to me, very intensely these days, especially the frightening experiences during those nights:

- For example, the emotion I felt from the approaching of a submarine, or a torpedo-boat with commandos, Greeks and British with weapons, supplies, and news!

- The phantasmagoric air battles, sea battles and air-sea battles in the waters that connect your country with ours.

- The wireless that connected us with the allied Headquarters in this country. The illegal radio with its news, some true, most of them filled with propaganda, however, all of them comforting and hopeful. News coming from this country where I knew many of my fellow villagers and family members were fighting. **Cairo** and **Alexandria** especially had become places of giants in my childish imagination. Alexandria in

¹ Summary of lectures at Cairo and Alexandria

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by **Alexandros K. Papaderos, Dr. Ph.-Theol.**
General Director of the Orthodox Academy of Crete
Counselor of the Pedagogical Institute
Ministry of National Education and Religions/Athens

particular! It appeared to provoke some subconscious coherence because of my name. And it made me feel as if **Alexander the Great**, the glorious Greek of Macedonia, lost in the East, would suddenly appear in front of me coming on top of the waves, lightly stepping on his sister's Gorgona's shoulders, to liberate us!

3. The years passed without erasing the emotions. On the contrary: the broader knowledge of the relation between Hellenism and Orthodoxy and these places, and particularly their relations with Crete from the time of Minos and the Pharaohs till the time of Meletios Metaxakis, Patriarch of Alexandria, make this my question reasonable: why can't we explore today more positively this tradition to the degree that we should and could; a tradition which is so rich in creative communication and useful lessons of History?

4. By the above mentioned, I believe you can understand some of the reasons for my gratitude to the Greek Embassy in this country and especially to its select staff member and distinguished scientist Mr. K. Moskof, for their kind invitation, as well as to His Beatitude, Parthenios, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, who gave us his fatherly blessing for this visit.

5. Everything I confessed to you in the beginning explain, I imagine, why, despite all the distances and differences, I feel very intimate with this region. It was the same feeling accompanying me on my air flight above the wide, blue sea which is not something separating us. It is our sea, the sea of all of us. Just as the whole Mediterranean **space** and **time**. With all that they include, both time and space compose, I suppose, a large variety, which despite all its internal differences and contradictions, maintains an inner, deeply spiritual unity.

6. It is difficult to express in words this intimacy and prove with arguments. It is the things, the persons and the actions that form that material-spiritual "chorochronos" (spacetime), which is for me - and for you, I hope, the

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our common home.

7. That's why I would like to share with you some thoughts and concerns, dreams and hopes about that oikos by informing you about two programs of the Orthodox Academy of Crete that also relate to the Mediterranean, and I hope will attract some interest among the people living in this region of the world. It is about the

INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY
and the
EUROMEDITERRANEAN YOUTH CENTER

Preceding that however, please allow me to say only a few words about the Orthodox Academy of Crete, since both programs mentioned are departments of the Academy.

ORTHODOX ACADEMY OF CRETE

8. The Orthodox Academy of Crete (O.A.C.) is an Institution of **dialogue** between Church and modern man on the burning issues of his life. It has a canonical relation to the Holy Metropolis of Kisamos and Selinon, works with the blessing of the Church of Crete, and respects as its Spiritual Patron His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos, who is a member of the Academy, as is also His Beatitude Parthenios, the Patriarch of Alexandria.

9. In the brochure you've been given, you can see the main sectors where the dialogue takes place in our Academy in the form of conferences organized by our Institution on its own responsibility or in cooperation with ecclesiastical, scientific and other organizations. In the O.A.C.'s 24 years of work, 1,200 conferences have been realized. More than half were international. And in many of them, we had the pleasure to have scientists also from Egypt and other countries of North Africa. Relatively frequent are also visits by fathers, brothers and sisters from Churches from this region.

10. These contacts bring us real happiness, because among other things, the O.A.C. anticipated as its mission from the beginning, to be a bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. This because we believe, cultures and spiritual values begun and developed in the Mediterranean region don't belong only to the past. They belong equally to the present and the future of Europe and all mankind. That's why they should be cultivated and made known in every way possible. This conviction explains also the fact that both programs I'd like to inform you about now, we directly connected with the broader area of the Mediterranean. It pertains, I repeat, to the Institute of Theology and Ecology and the Euromediterranean Youth Center.

INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

11. The Institute was planned several years ago. It was finally established in October 1991. The official announcement was made last year on November 6th, during the opening session of an Interorthodox Conference on the Protection of the Natural Environment, called by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We had the pleasure to have presiding during that first session His Beatitude Parthenios the Patriarch of Alexandria.

12. The first aims of the Institute are recorded in the brochure you have at your disposal. In order to fulfill them, we are already cooperating with the Polytechnic University of Crete. We would be very grateful to have the advice, and much more, the contribution of people from this friendly country for the advancement of the Institute's aims. I would like to inform you especially about two of them that are directly connected with the Mediterranean:

13. One of those aims refers to the elaboration of **scientific studies** on ecological problems of the Mediterranean. I am certain that the Polytechnic University of Crete, the University, and other Research

Centers of our island would be delighted with any interest shown for cooperation by corresponding Institutions of Egypt and other Mediterranean countries. Moreso, since students from those countries are already attending the University and the Polytechnic of Crete, while others are doing post graduate studies at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania, Crete, which is related to the International Center of Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies. The Institute of Chania offers post graduate educational programs and scholarships to agriculturists, economists, foresters, biologists, and other scientists in comparable fields. Besides it's known that ecological research programs can also be financially supported by several European Community funds, and by the United Nations Organization, whose General Secretary presently, by happy coincidence, is a select son of this country. The Institute of Theology and Ecology is willing to offer every possible assistance for the elaboration of those scientific studies. Of course, also in this case has to be applied what is described in paragraph 6c of the brochure you have been given, that the Institute also aims "To generate creative challenges to workers of Science, Technology and politics, and to invite them, not to restrict themselves only to pragmatic considerations of ecological problems, with the result that the impasse is repeated and aggravated, but to account also the deeper ethical and spiritual causes of the ecological problems, so that proposed solutions can be global and effective."

14. ~~The second aim is a~~ priority of the Institute that I would like to propose also from this place with every possible emphasis and formality. It has to do with aim 5e - that aims in **"the endeavor to establish and develop interreligious ecological dialogue (mainly between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) on the complexity of ecological problems of the MEDITERRANEAN and to formulate together and accept an**

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with basic ethical principles and mutual affirmations for a long range cooperation toward ecological protection of the Mediterranean."

15. I suspect that our invitation to cooperate in the aspiration of such a high aim raises many legitimate questions. I will gladly discuss them with you later on. Indeed perhaps the questions will be somewhat limited, if you allow me the following clarifications:

16. Certainly we know that the problems for the protection of the waters, and in general the natural environment are primarily within the scope of the responsibilities of scientists, technologists, economists, politicians. And we don't forget that because many of those problems don't have national boundaries, their solution is a matter of international cooperation and agreements on a regional, and/or universal level. And of course, we know about the efforts made and continue to be made on an interstate and international level, and the generous actions of various ecological initiatives. We also know however, that despite the above and

many other activities, the ecological problems of the Mediterranean as well as of the entire planet, worsen day by day and hence, directly threaten the life of man and every living being.

17. That means, among other things, that while it's necessary that the responsible persons be encouraged to take more drastic measures, radical solutions to the problems will not be found if their "roots", their deeper causes are not revealed. And according to our conviction, those are found in deeper areas than the political and the economical: the ecological problem is substantially **p n e u m a t o l o g i c a l**- theological-ethical!

18. That's why we support that the **time has come for religion to raise its voice**. This doesn't mean that the others must keep silent - the governments, International Organizations, technologists, the zealous ecologists! We only state that all of them are obliged to listen carefully to what only Religion is able, and is obligated to most emphatically declare. What is that? Precisely what was previously stressed: that the ecological problem is substantially pneumatological-theological-ethical!

19. But of course, another question comes up: can, if not all, at least the three monotheistic -that is the Mediterranean- Religions speak about the ecological problem in **one voice**? Haven't many interreligious dialogues been conducted for years without any substantial results and perspective? How can Christianity, Judaism and Islam agree on something without betraying themselves and without becoming subjected to the danger of **syncretism**?

20. We say, may Religions speak at last. May each one loudly and clearly say whatever it has to say about the ecological problem. For example, as the Orthodox Church has in recent years following the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and in collaboration with all the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Even recently the Primate of our Orthodox Churches have addressed also the ecological issue in the proclamation they have signed and announced at the Patriarchate of Constantinople this past March 15th. We are certain that if the three monotheistic religions will speak concretely on the ecological problem, each one interpreting faithfully and genuinely their own tradition, people would hear different words perhaps, but they would finally understand the same basic truths:

- That **the cosmos belongs exclusively to its Creator, God, and**
- That **man is simply the steward and guard of that cosmos, and not its master and insatiable exploiter.**

If I'm not mistaken, the three monotheistic Religions of the region confess those two principles. The

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we propose, could therefore easily specialize those positions, formulating basic ethical principles and determining mutual ties leading to a long term cooperation of Religious leaders and other faithful persons willing to engage themselves and contribute to the struggle for the protection of the Mediterranean.

21. We don't underestimate the difficulties of such a proposal. We risk it even if it borders on utopia. And we believe that the theological dialogue between the Religions, which up to now is likely moving to an impasse, can be proven fruitful, if it fixes as its objective very practical issues, as those of Ecology. The extent of ecological catastrophes in the Mediterranean region, and in general, the seriousness of the circumstances compels us, I think, to dare to venture where there appears to be no hope. Just a few years ago who could believe that so many walls would fall in Europe? How can so many wounds be healed? And yet! the common

OIKOS OF EUROPE

is already being built, despite all the old and new difficulties. Why shouldn't we also visualize for this region a new interhuman fellowship, thanks to which the

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will house in peaceful coexistence, togetherness, and cooperation the large family of its people?

In this kind of house for all, interest will not be directed only to the protection of the natural environment. Because precisely the three monotheistic religions know very well that the meaning of OIKOS is a spiritual one. Just as spiritual is also the meaning of Ecology in its substance. That's why it consists not only of the natural environment, but of all those things, which especially here in the Mediterranean have a preeminently religious character:

- The cultural tradition of the Mediterranean region in its wholeness of expressions and memorials that must not be pillaged as in the past, and being done today unfortunately in the occupied part of Cyprus.

- The religious objects of worship and places of pilgrimage which must not be permitted to be desecrated by thoughtless, irresponsible and raw commercialized tourism.

- All the great and wondrous things through which the Grace of God has marked this most blessed region of the world.

- All those and many others are a matter of ecological concern, as we understand and propose it in the above framework. We are pleased for the CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS, even though it's frequently violated! Why shouldn't human beings, who respect God, undertake the initiative to formulate, approve, and apply a

CHARTER OF RIGHTS OF NATURE AND CIVILIZATION

for the creatures of God and the achievements of man?

- Don't the waters from the wells and the seas have rights?
- Don't the birds in the skies, man's works of art on the face of the earth and those of nature in the depths of the ocean have rights?

22. As we have stated, the cooperation we propose is of long term duration. Among other things needed is the will, ways, and means for man

to meet with man, **face to face!** Every one can and must do something toward this sacred goal, to serve the great and holy mystery of interhuman communication, and the cooperation for the protection of the divine Creation and the labors of previous generations for the benefit of the generations to come.

23. As I said in the beginning, this is exactly what we strive for at the Orthodox Academy. Because the cooperation of people and religions for peace, justice and the protection of the divine Creation is especially a matter of EDUCATION, the Orthodox Academy of Crete started another program directed toward **youth**. And we very consciously chose the name of the new program: The

EUROMEDITERRANEAN YOUTH CENTER.

Please allow me to briefly inform you about it.

24. We are talking about a village for young people from Europe and the Mediterranean, for a EUROMEDITERRANEAN place of meeting and education. The North-South orientation is a conscious choice, preeminently needed, especially today. Because -this is our firm conviction- the history of mankind will not proceed normally if the rich countries of the northern Hemisphere continue to write it. We believe that if the 20th century was marked mainly by the tensions between East and West, the next century will be marked by the tensions between North and South, wealth and poverty, the scientific/technological, and military supremacy and dependency.

25. Crete, in many aspects, is the South of the North, and the North of the South. It offers to the young people of Europe and the Mediterranean the EUROMEDITERRANEAN YOUTH CENTER as a meeting place, to get to know each other, and exercise mutual respect and cooperation in order to apply those spiritual and ethical principles, respect for which is a basic presupposition for the survival of the human race and its natural environment.

26. Unfortunately, we don't have the time to inform you analytically about the Center. I refer to the brochure you've all been given, and at the end, I am ready to answer questions you may have. I would only like to say that during the past two summers, groups of 303 young men and women from 25 countries of Europe and America were hosted at the Center. Unfortunately, we only had one young man from the Eastern Mediterranean countries, from Syria. So you can understand why I so eagerly emphasize our invitation to you to send us groups of young people also from your country.

27. It's time though for me to finish. Instead of a synopsis with words, I would like to show you some pictures from Crete.

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28. I would like to thank you again for your invitation and also for your attention, and to close my address with some thoughts borrowed from an address written by His Beatitude Parthenios, the Patriarch of

Alexandria, and heard by us at Canberra, Australia, February of last year during the 7th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches whose theme was "Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole Creation".

Among other things, His Beatitude wrote the following:

"Our goal is the unity of the world. Such unity is not alien to the work of the Holy Spirit and the Church. The Spirit blows where he wills, and we have no right, nor is it an act of love, for us to restrict his movement and his breathing, to bind him with fetters and barbed wire. The visit of the Holy Spirit is a mystery, and in the oikoumene the Seminal Word of God lives through the Holy Spirit....

Christ proclaimed that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, male or female... ". Peace, justice and the integrity of our created world are all one. We have to keep our world "very good", as God created it, for over it hovers the Holy Spirit. May we not pollute, contaminate and defile nature and humanity. May we always love human beings and creation. May there be no slaves, may all be free. May we be just, may none be treated unjustly. May there be no hunger. May we support youth and old age. May there be no illiterate, uneducated, poor, refugees, migrants, forgotten ones, abandoned or lonely people. May we declare war on war."

But in order to accomplish all the above mentioned, as well as so many other essential things needed, at this time, courage, boldness and caution are necessary! May God have mercy on us!