



The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

A Daily Reading Program on the Christian Theology of Creation

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Serving the Orthodox
Church Since 2006

The Vision and Spiritual Direction of the Patriarchs and Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church

A Course of Daily Theological Reflections
on Christian Responsibility for
the Care and Keeping of God's Creation

Month Twelve
December 1-31, 2020

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration is an Affiliated Ministry
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Introduction

We have now completed twelve months of daily readings. From the beginning this series was created to present the writings of the Orthodox Patriarchs and top Hierarchs and to highlight their commentary on ecological issues as contemporary moral and spiritual mandates. Based upon the Scriptures and the Saints, their writings are not only about environmental issues; they also outline an Orthodox culture of the future. Their commentary is not so much about ecology per se as it is a pathway through our secular culture that leads into an intentional Orthodox Christian way of living. In this view ecology is initially about the care of God's creation, but looking deeper it is also about a journey that helps us live our theology, that avoids participation in the destruction of God's creation, and that launches a genuinely healing and transforming Christian culture.

More specifically our top hierarchs are providing guidance on how to follow Jesus Christ through the complexities of the modern world. Their statements help overcome the false assumptions hidden in the materialism, individualism, and love of luxury that dominate conventional society. This is critically important as their insights strengthen the Church, open parish doors to new members, and provide real solutions to the dreadful problems of our modern world.

Jesus reminds us, "happy (ie, in Greek *makarios*, meaning blessed or fortunate) are you as you do these things," as listed in the Gospels (John 13:17). Our top hierarchs are saying something similar as they translate ancient Christian teachings into the needs of the faithful in the modern world.

Across all jurisdictions and languages our Church leaders are telling us how the intentional care for God's good earth becomes a doorway that leads to the development of a genuine Christian way of life. Somehow though, we don't always recognize this connection. One reason perhaps is that the modern lifestyle dulls our sensitivities and lulls us into a false sense of separation between the life of the Church and the life of the fallen secular world. But for Christians there is only one vision and that is Christ and the Holy Spirit filling all things. Therefore, everything is imbued with a sacred character. This means we live in a holy world where we, like Jacob before us, should realize, regardless of where we live, "The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!" And "this is the house of God and the very gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:16-17).

This is the challenge we face: To live in such a way that our actions teach and demonstrate that we live in a sacred world, filled with the infinitely deep presence of God. The Patriarchs and Hierarchs are telling us how to engage the world's problems by their inspired and repeated advocacy. However, unless we are intentional in listening to their words, and absorbing and applying them, their speech flies past us like the blowing wind in a storm. As you absorb this last month of readings, please hear their teachings as practical guidance for the conduct of our lives and the healing of our world.

Yours in service to God's good earth,

MR - EM - ER - FK

The U.S. Bishops Statement on Climate Change

Nevertheless, we cannot stop there. We must also learn all that we can about the emerging situation of climate change. We must set an example in the way we choose to live, reaching out and informing others about this threat.

We must discuss with fellow parishioners and – since climate change is not only an issue for Orthodox Christians — we must raise the issue before public officials and elected representatives at the city, state and national levels. We are all responsible for this situation, and each one of us can do something to address the problem.

In each generation, God sends some great tests that challenge the life and future of society. One of the tests... is whether we will be obedient to the commands that God has given us by exercising self-restraint in our use of energy, or will we ignore those commands and continue to seek the comforts and excesses that over-reliance on fossil fuels involves.

At every Divine Liturgy, we pray for seasonable weather. Let us enter into this prayer and amend our lives in whatever ways may be necessary to meet the divine command that we care for the earth as the Lord's. If we can do this, if we can render our lives as a blessing rather than a curse for our neighbors and for the whole creation, then, God willing, we may live and flourish. This is not an optional matter. We will be judged by the choices we make. The Scriptures bluntly tell us that if we destroy the earth, then God will destroy us (Revelation 11:18).

Let us all recall the commands of God regarding our use of the earth. Let us respond to the divine commandments so that the blessings of God may be abundantly upon us. And let us responsibly discern the right, holy and proper way to live in this time of change and challenge. Then we shall “perceive everything in the light of the Creator God” (St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4,58).

HE Archbishop Demitrios, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America;
HE Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), Archdiocese of North America, Antiochian Orthodox Church; Church;
HE Metropolitan Christopher, President, Episcopal Council (SCOBA), Serbian Orthodox Church;

Q

What will it take to apply all of these directives?

How will you share this message about Orthodox theology and climate change?

How might your life change if you followed these directions?

Reflection

Entering Sacred Space and Sacred Time

God does not only appear to Moses [on Mount Sinai], but He also issues a practical command: “Remove the sandals from your feet.” According to Greek Fathers such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, sandals or shoes – being made from the skins of dead animals – are something lifeless, inert, dead and earthly, and so they symbolize the heaviness, weariness, and mortality that assail our human nature as a result of the Fall. “Remove your sandals,” then, may be understood to signify: Strip off from yourself the deadness of familiarity and boredom; free yourself from the lifelessness of the trivial, the mechanical, the repetitive; wake up, open your eyes, cleanse the doors of your perception, look and see!

And what happens to us when in this manner we strip off the dead skins of boredom and triviality? At once we realize the truth of God's next words to Moses: “The place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Set free from spiritual deadness, awakening from sleep, opening our eyes both outwardly and inwardly, we look upon the world around us in a different way. Everything appears to us new and strange ... inexpressibly rare, and delightful, and beautiful.

We experience everything as vital and living, and we discover the truth of William Blake's *dictum* , “Every thing that lives is Holy.”

So we enter the dimensions of sacred space and sacred time. We discern the great within the small, the extraordinary within the ordinary, "a world in a grain of sand ... and eternity in an hour," to quote Blake once more. This place where I am, *this* tree, *this* animal, *this* person to whom I am speaking, *this* moment of time through which I am living: each is holy, each is unique and unrepeatable, and each is therefore infinite in value.

HE Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, “Through Creation to the Creator,”
London, UK, 1996

Q

Why does God instruct Moses to take off his sandals?

Where can a person find holy ground in today's world?

What does it mean for Christian behavior that each thing is infinite in value?

Reflection

Humans are Responsible for the State of the World

All humanity is responsible for the state of nature – God’s creation. Resource depletion, and environmental pollution, amid a rising world population, raise with special urgency the question of concerted efforts by all nations to preserve the biodiversity of life, the diligent use of natural resources, and the prevention of environmental disasters because of human activities.

The Ancestral Fall distorted primordial nature. Scripture testifies “the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but by the will of him who subjected it” (Rom. 8:20). Pollution and destruction of nature are the direct consequence of human sin, its visible embodiment. Various manifestations of sinful attitudes toward nature are characteristic of consumer society, which emphasizes the main purpose of making a profit. The only way to restore the health of nature is the spiritual rebirth of the individual and society, in a true Christian, ascetic, human relation to one’s own needs, curbing the passions in consistent self-restraint.

Guided by God’s commandment to protect the created world (Genesis 2:15), and care for human spiritual and physical health, the Russian Orthodox Church is committed to continue discussion about environmental issues, and to work on this problem in collaboration with all who are concerned about our environment and maintaining a healthy and normal life.

The Russian Orthodox Church, confessing biblical teaching about the relationship between humans and the world, promotes understanding of the theological and philosophical bases for environmental action. This vision emphasizes the difference between a theocentric worldview and a humanist anthropocentrism, which views the world as a source of “selfish and irresponsible consumption,” and the pagan deification of nature, which sometimes elevates nature above human beings, and that people should not change or interfere with nature.

HB Patriarch Kyrill and the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church,
English translation by Olesya Siewers. February 2-5, 2013

Q

Why are humans responsible for the state of the world?

How do God’s commands ensure a healthy world?

What is the Church’s vision of the created world?

Reflection

The Orthodox Contribution to the Environment

When it comes to the proper theological reflection, there is no doubt that our Orthodox Church has a great deal to contribute to the contemporary debate concerning ecology. We are able to draw upon the depth and wealth of our Scriptural and Patristic heritage to contribute positively and constructively to the critical issues of our time. Where, however, as Orthodox Christians, we reveal our greatest vulnerability lies in the practice of our theory.

Just how many of us examine the foods that we consume, the goods that we purchase, the energy that we waste, or the consequences of our privileged living? How often do we take time to scrutinize the choices that we make on a daily basis, whether as individuals, as institutions, or as parishes?

More importantly, just how many of our Orthodox clergy are prepared to assume leadership on issues concerning the environment? How many of our Orthodox parishes and communities are prepared to materialize the knowledge that we have accumulated in recent years by practicing ecologically sensitive principles in their own communities?

In an age when information is readily available to us, there is surely no excuse for ignorance or indifference. Nevertheless, today, we stand at a crossroads, at a point of choosing the cross that we have to bear. For, today, we know fully well the ecological and global impact of our decisions and actions, irrespective of how minimal or insignificant these may be.

Recent unusual fluctuations in temperature, typhoons, earthquakes, violent storms, the pollution of the seas and rivers, and the many other catastrophic actions for man and the environment ought to be an obvious alarm for something to be done with human behavior.

It is our sincere hope and fervent prayer that in the years ahead, more and more of our Orthodox faithful will recognize the importance of a crusade for our environment.... This vision will only benefit future generation by leaving behind a cleaner, better world. We owe it to our Creator. And we owe it to our children.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Day of Prayer for Creation,
September 1, 2016

Q

Why do we Orthodox often have trouble being true to our ecological theology?

What correction is needed for Orthodox to embrace our ecological responsibilities?

What sins are involved in a failure to fulfill our duty to God to care for the earth?

Reflection

Why The Ecological Crisis is a Spiritual Problem

The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem. The proper relationship between humanity and the earth was broken with the Fall, both outwardly and within us, and this rupture is sin. The Church must now introduce in its teaching about sin, the sin against the environment, “the ecological sin.” Repentance must be extended to cover also the damage we do to nature as individuals and as societies. This must be brought to the conscience of every Christian who cares for his or her salvation.

The rupture of the proper relationship between humanity and nature is due to the rise of individualism in our culture. The pursuit of individual happiness has been made into an ideal in our time. Ecological sin is due to human greed which blinds men and women to the point of ignoring and disregarding the basic truth that the happiness of the individual depends on its relationship with the rest of human beings. There is a social dimension in ecology... The ecological crisis goes hand in hand with the spread of social injustice. We cannot face successfully the one without dealing with the other.

Ecological sin is a sin not only against God, but also our neighbor. And it is a sin not only against the other of our own time but also – and this is serious – against future generations. By destroying our planet to satisfy our greed for happiness in the present time, we bequeath to future generations a world damaged beyond repair with all the negative consequences that this will have for their lives. We must act, therefore, responsibly towards our children and those who will succeed us in this life. All this calls for what we may describe as an ecological asceticism.

HE Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon,
Commentary on Encyclical *Laudato Si'*
Vatican City, Rome, June 18, 2015

Q

How does the Church teach about ecological sin?

What effect does individualism have upon our culture?

What are the outward and inward dimensions of the Fall?

Reflection

Prophetic Witnesses to a Global Climate Emergency

Climate change is a result of greed, inequality and wanton destruction of God's Earth, the repercussions of which are felt by all, most especially the poor.

We are in the midst of a climate emergency.... The world is nowhere near meeting emission reduction targets and the latest IPCC report highlights that “only with rapid and far-reaching” transitions in the world economy, on a scale and at a rate without historical precedent, can the 1.5° climate [goal] be achieved. It is therefore a time to reconcile ourselves with creation through concrete repentance and urgent action. ...

During this critical and trying time, we acknowledge ...this current crisis and affirm ourselves as prophetic witnesses. Jesus has given us a choice between God and mammon, and for those who choose to obey, we have no choice but to pursue Justice (Micah 6:8).

His Eminence Seraphim, Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All-Africa,, December 3, 2019

Q

How is global climate change a result of greed and inequality?

What does it mean that we are in the midst of a climate emergency?

What is prophetic witness? How is justice a dimension of this witness?

Reflections

Asceticism as Restraint

The great figures of the Christian ascetical tradition were all sensitive to the suffering of all creatures. The equivalent of a St. Francis of Assisi is abundantly present in the monastic tradition of the East. There are accounts of the lives of the desert saints which present the ascetic as weeping for the suffering or death of every creature and as leading a peaceful and friendly co-existence even with the wild beasts. This is not romanticism. This springs from a loving heart and the conviction that between the natural world and ourselves there is an organic unity and interdependence that makes us share a common fate just as we have the same Creator.

Asceticism is an unpleasant idea in our present culture, which measures happiness and progress with the increase of capital and consumption. It would be unrealistic to expect our societies to adopt asceticism in the way St. Francis and the Desert Fathers of the East experienced it. But the spirit and the ethos of asceticism can and must be adopted if our planet is to survive.

Restraint in the consumption of natural resources is a realistic attitude and ways must be found to put a limit to the immense waste of natural materials. Technology and science must devote their efforts to such a task.

HE Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon,
“Commentary on Encyclical Laudato Si!”
Vatican City, Rome, June 18, 2015

Q

Why does an invisible unity exist between each person and the natural world?

How does holiness lead to sensitivity and care for the earth and its creatures?

How does personal transformation lead to the transfiguration of creation?

Reflection

The Vocation of Humanity and Each Person (part one)

The vocation of humanity, as shown in liturgical theology, is not to dominate and exploit nature, but to transfigure and hallow it. In a variety of ways - through the cultivation of the earth, through craftsmanship, through the writing of books and the painting of icons - humanity gives material things a voice and renders the creation articulate in praise of God.

In the Egyptian Liturgy of Saint Mark we find the following prayer: "But keep, O Lord, our journey through this life free from storm and hurt unto the end. Send down refreshing rain upon the places that have need of it; gladden and renew refreshing drops and become green.... Bless, O Lord, the fruits of the earth, keep them for us free from disease and hurt, and prepare them for our sowing and our harvest.... Bless now also, O Lord, the crown of the year through Thy goodness for the sake of the poor among Thy people, for the sake of the widow and the orphan, for the sake of the wanderer and the newcomer and for the sake of all who trust in Thee and call upon Thy Holy Name."

To bless is to give thanks. In and through thanksgiving, we acknowledge the true nature of things we receive from God and thus enable them to attain the fullness God intended for them. We bless and sanctify things when we offer them to God in a eucharistic movement of our whole being. And as we stand before the cosmos, before the matter given to us by God, this eucharistic movement becomes all-embracing.

We are to bless and praise God for the world. We are defined as a "eucharist" animal because we are capable of seeing the world as God's gift, as a sacrament of God's presence and a means of communion with Him. So we are able to offer the world back to God as thanksgiving: "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all."

HG Bishop Irineu [Pop], The Romanian Orthodox Church.
The InterOrthodox Conference on Environmental Protection, Crete, 1991.

Q

Can you summarize the lesson in this reading?

What is its essence as it applies to you?

If you followed the meaning in this reading, how would that change you?

Reflection

Restoring Proper Relationship to God and Creation (part Two)

This liturgical expression reflects the Orthodox vision and understanding of our relationship both with creation and with the Creator. We are the free agents through whom creation is offered to the Creator. The Eucharist is the most sublime expression and experience of creation transformed by God the Holy Spirit through redemption and worship. In the form of bread and wine, material from creation molded into new form by human hands is offered to God with the acknowledgment that all of creation is God's and that we are returning to God that which is His.

The primordial relationship of Adam to both God and Creation is restored in the Eucharist, and we have a foretaste of the eschatological state of Creation. But when we look today at our world, we see a very different picture. Humanity's rebellion, pride and greed has shattered the primordial relationship of Adam. It has ignored the Church's understanding of our role as priest of creation. By doing so, our world is facing a crisis of death and corruption to a degree never before experienced.

We must attempt to return to the proper relationship with the Creator and creation in order to ensure the survival of the natural world. We are called to bear some of the pain of creation as well as to enjoy and celebrate it. That means to perform *Liturgia extra muros*, the Liturgy beyond or outside the walls of the church, for the sanctification of the world....

HG Bishop Irineu [Pop], The Romanian Orthodox Church.
The InterOrthodox Conference on Environmental Protection, Crete, 1991.

Q

What is the vision hidden in this reading?

Why does partaking of the Eucharist begin our transformation?

What does *Liturgia extra muros* mean? How does it apply to you?

Reflection

Why an Ascetic Vision and Attitude is Essential

Every year on World Environment Day, we say that we “celebrate the environment!” However, this expression shows that for many, ignorance and indifference still exist about this day. Because it is not just a celebration, but a day of reflection and taking stock of efforts made to protect creation. It is a decisive day for the renewal of the fight for the salvation of our house, which was offered to us by the Creator, our planet Earth.

I have many times expressed the opinion that quite often, the discussions on this subject are reminiscent of dialogues of the deaf. While in theory, all of us perceive the critical state of the issue and many actually do take initiatives or strive eagerly to contribute to its resolution, the problem remains and has not been corrected.

The saints of the Orthodox Church, having accomplished the purpose of their existence and participating in the divine glory, show and teach us the ecological idea. Thus St. Isaac the Syrian defines a merciful heart as “a heart burning for the whole creation, for people, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for all creatures.” As for Saint Cosmas of Aetolia, he prophesied that “people will become poor because they will not love trees.”

Therefore, the ecological problem is fundamentally a spiritual problem, with enormous moral dimensions. If we do not free ourselves from egocentrism and eudemonism (the belief that happiness is the test of right behavior), if we do not have an ascetic vision of creation and of our use of material goods and wealth, the ecological problem will spread, instead of being stopped. This is why the fundamental challenge of World Environment Day is for all to repent, to return to God the Creator, and to reintegrate ourselves in the perspective of the divine plan for creation and the environment.

HE Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, World Environment Day sermon,
Athens, Greece, June 4, 2019

Q

Why is care for the environment a spiritual problem?

How may we correct our relationship and interactions with God’s creation?

What is the ideal relationship that we as Christians should have with creation?

Reflection

At a Crossroad of History

We stand at a critical moment in the history and future of our planet, a time when our human family must choose the future of our earth community. The protection of our planet's vitality and diversity is a sacred task and a common vocation.

At a summit organized by our Church... former NASA climate scientist Professor James Hansen observed: "Our parents honestly did not know that their actions could harm future generations. But we, in our current generation, can only pretend that we do not know."

It is not too late to act, but we cannot afford to wait; we certainly cannot afford not to act at all. We all agree on the necessity to protect our planet's natural resources, which are neither limitless nor negotiable. We are all in this together: people of faith must practice what they preach; citizens of the world must clearly voice their opinion; and political leaders must act urgently and decisively.

Dear friends, this is our ethical and honorable obligation; this is our word of promise and hope to the entire world.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Manila, The Philippines,
February 26, 2015

Q

Why do we share a moral and ethical obligation to take care of the earth?

What does it mean that we live in a world that is polluted and degraded?

Why do you think HAH says that we cannot afford to wait?

Reflection

Our Huge Responsibility to Save our Planet

We must become conscious that everything in the world belongs to God who created it in order to respect God's creation. This means we humans are under no circumstance proprietors of God's creation but people who accept his commandments, that is, the rules of His management. Hence, we become conscious that we have a serious responsibility for environmental protection, which is associated with the respect, which we all owe to our Creator God.

Hence, the whole of creation, our planet and whatever exists on it, is God's wider habitation.... Man, as an inseparable part of this habitation within God, must be protected in every way.... The same applies to every part of creation. In this way we show special reverence to the Creator. Under no circumstances may man create an opposition with his environment.... We must not fall victims to inhuman arrogance and the unacceptable issues of colonization and the lack of control over industrial processes and the unjust exploitation of man towards his fellow human beings, and thus see nature as their adversary and enemy which they should besiege, pillage, conquer and rudely rape, changing her ... into a huge cemetery....

Our Church does not view nature and the environment as adversaries, but as that reality in which we ourselves belong. Thus we become conscious that we are all part of nature and consequently by protecting Nature we protect ourselves. That is the safe course for our survival.

As Christians, we should respond to our huge responsibilities to save our Planet, so that we can provide a united front in our great peaceful battle for survival. This effort begins with the degree to which we are prepared to struggle ... for the reign of justice in the world as the only means which will lead us to in live within God's real peace. May God bless you!

HB Patriarch Theodoros II, Pope of Alexandria and All Africa,
September 8, 2012

Q

Why do so many Christians fail to protect God's creation?

What does it mean to be victimized by "lack control over industrial processes?"

How does the Orthodox Church honor and respect the natural world?

Reflection

Self-Denial as the Key to Environmental Transformation

In Christ's life as in the life of the Christian, glory and suffering go together. Moreover, during the actual moment of his Transfiguration, what Jesus speaks about with Moses and Elijah is precisely his coming "exodus" or departure at Jerusalem, that is to say, his imminent death (Luke 9:31).

From this and from much else in the New Testament, it is clear that in Christ's earthly experience, light and darkness, joy and sorrow, are intimately connected.... What is true of Christ is true also of each Christian.

It is only through the willing acceptance of suffering that we can come to understand the meaning of glory. To be a Christian is to share, at one and the same time, in the self-emptying and sacrifice of the Cross, and in the overwhelming joy of the Transfiguration and the Resurrection. To be transfigured with Christ does not mean that we escape all suffering; it means that we are to find transfiguration in the suffering. The transfigured Christ offers not a way *around*, but *through*. This teaching about suffering and glory, indeed, is in no way limited to Christianity. The other great faiths affirm the same, each in its characteristic way.

All this needs to be applied to our ecological work, whether for our own or for future generations. There can be no transformation of the environment without self-denial, no fundamental renewal of the cosmos without voluntary sacrifice. In Christ's words, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Gain comes through loss, life through death, transfiguration through cross-bearing.

HE Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, "Safeguarding the Creation for Future Generations," June 8, 2002

Q

What is the meaning of the word "glory"?

What is the meaning of the cross for ordinary Christians?

How does the cross relate to our ecological work?

Reflection

Guardians and Protectors of the Natural World

It is with great anguish and grief that we observe the increasing ill-treatment and continuous abuse of the natural environment, the rivers, the seas, and the different kinds of animals that live therein.

The extreme weather phenomena, the increase in temperature, the inconsiderate exploitation of the natural resources, the ill-treatment of the animals and many other offenses, are actions that compose the tragic abuse of the environment from humans around the world. The disturbing of the natural order and harmony, originally from the failure of our forefathers in Eden, is achieving worrying proportions with unknown consequences. “The whole creation in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth (Romans 8:22), because of unending human greed.

The church has always called for people to respect natural resources and to use them with prudence. The Church’s belief emanates from its inspirational cosmic teachings that the environment belongs to everybody and its destruction will affect all people as a unit and each one separately.

The Holy Metropolis of Tamasos and Orinis calls its members to respect, to love and become guardians and protectors of the natural and animal environment , not only because it is a divine commandment, but also for their own benefit. This is why it is introducing a department for the protection of the environment and is appointing a special priest as a coordinator of its actions and is planning seminars for the education of clergy and other officers as well as organized activities and discussions to promote the protection of the natural environment and the animal kingdom.

HE Metropolitan Isaias of Tamasou and Orinis, Orthodox Church of Cyprus,
Public Announcement to the Church, September 24, 2014

Q

Why should Orthodox Christians respect animals and nature?

How often have you heard the Church’s mandate to respect nature in your parish?

Why isn’t this call more prominent in the Orthodox Church?

Reflection

Protects the Environment to Protect Yourself

Our Holy Church always prays to God for the preservation and protection of the environment. He reminded us through the Holy Bible that if the human wants to live in balance, peace and health in this world, he must respect and value the environment as a divine creation, and not abuse this great gift of God, but demonstrate in practice his sincere gratitude.

The Holy Church declares that man cannot be autonomous from the rest of creation, nor can he exist without it. Therefore, when he protects the environment, he protects himself.

The Lord has placed man in the world as king and priest of creation to work the works of light and love, and not to destroy God's creation through misuse.

The Saints of our Church also put forward environmental awareness, such as Saint Luke of Mount Stirion, who took care of the trees and the plants. Saint Cosmas of Aetolia used to say that people will remain poor for not showing love for the trees.

The Church continues to respect the environment in words and deed as a divine creation, through the establishment of September 1st as a day of prayer for the environment....

We wish this year's celebration of the day to awaken the consciences of all, so that we can appreciate and respect the divine creation and through it the Poet and Creator of all.

HE Archbishop Ieronymos, Greek Orthodox Church,
Message on World Environment Day,
Athens, Greece, June 4, 2020

Q

Why must Christians respect and protect the environment?

If we fail in this responsibility, what happens?

As priests of God's creation, what are our duties toward the world?

Reflection

The Vision of the Sacred in Daily Life

We offer you the opportunity and the motivation to study more deeply, not only the technical and humanitarian parameters of the problem of pollution, but also its Christian and theological perspective. This will enable you to become more deeply conscious of your mission to work with love and piety, and to cooperate with each person dealing with the subject of the environment, for its protection from actions that create pollution and destroy the environment.

This sensitization of ourselves and of those around us, especially those who direct the great pollutants, together with the voluntary avoidance of ecologically destructive lifestyles by members of our society, and their influence over those who do not conform, constitutes the most fruitful way of environmental correction and of revival for the Black Sea and every burdened ecosystem.

We repeat... our invitation to all of you - to the Orthodox and other Churches, and to the religious leaders of the faiths in the neighboring region, as well as in the depths of Europe, Asia, and Asia Minor..., to convey to all peoples the need to raise awareness about pollution, to the level at least of those people who some 2,500 years ago would not even wash their hands in the rivers.

We thank all those who are mobilized together with us for the reintroduction of the sense of sacredness as the guideline for our life, as well as all those who from whatever position carry on the struggle for the preservation of life in the Black Sea, thereby contributing to and assisting our neighboring peoples.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, The Halki Ecological Institute,
June 13, 1999

Q

Why is the avoidance of pollution a Christian duty?

Why is study needed to understand pollution's implications?

How can a person raise awareness about the need to protect creation?

Reflection

A Campaign for the Environment

Just how many of us examine the foods that we consume, the goods that we purchase, the energy that we waste, or the consequences of our privileged living? How often do we scrutinize the choices that we make, whether as individuals, as institutions, as parishes, as communities, as societies, and even as nations?

More importantly, how many of our Orthodox clergy are prepared to assume leadership on issues concerning the environment? How many of our parishes and communities are prepared to materialize the knowledge that we have accumulated by practicing ecologically-sensitive principles? In an age when the information is readily available, there is no excuse for ignorance or indifference.

Today, more than any other time, we are in a unique position. We stand at a crossroads, at a point of choosing the cross that we have to bear. For, today, we know the ecological and global impact of our decisions and actions, irrespective of how minimal or insignificant these may be.

It is our sincere hope and fervent prayer that in the years ahead, more and more of our Orthodox faithful will recognize the importance of a crusade for our environment, which we have so selfishly ignored. This vision, we are convinced, will only benefit future generation by leaving behind a cleaner, better world. We owe it to our Creator. And we owe it to our children.

HAH, Letter on the Day of Prayers for Creation, September 1, 2004

Q

What does it take to assume leadership on ecology issues?

What is involved in helping a parish to “go green”?

How is society now at a crossroads, as HAH relates?

Reflection

The Greatest Threat to our World Today

We know that the greatest threat to our world today is climate change and its destructive consequences for our survival on the planet.

It is impossible to care for human beings while destroying the environment as the foundation of life. In the sacraments of the Church, creation is affirmed and human beings are encouraged to act as stewards, protectors and “priests of creation,” offering it in doxology to the Creator. Every form of abuse and destruction of creation, constitutes a distortion of the Christian gospel.

The Church calls upon its Archdioceses and Metropolises.... to develop initiatives, coordinate projects, organize activities that foster environmental awareness, so that our faithful may realize that protection of the environment is the spiritual responsibility of every one of us.

The burning issue of climate change... offers an opportunity to engage in dialogue, but it is vitally important that you emphasize action at the local level. The parish constitutes the cell of church life as the place of personal witness, communication and collaboration—a living community of worship and service.

Special attention must be directed to the organization of Christ-centered educational programs for our youth to cultivate an ecological ethos. Ecclesiastical instruction must instill a respect for creation as “very good” (Gen. 1:26), encouraging them to advocate and advance creation care and protection....

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, The Phanar,
September 1, 2018

Q

Why is climate change the greatest threat facing the world today?

What can Christians do to address this threat?

What does this mean in practical terms?

Reflection

Why the Ecological Problem is a Spiritual Problem

Every year on this day, World Environment Day, we say that we “celebrate the environment!” However, this expression shows that for many, ignorance and indifference still exist about this day. Because it is not just a celebration, but a day of reflection and taking stock of efforts made to protect creation. It is a decisive day for the renewal of the fight for the salvation of our house, which was offered to us by the Creator, our planet Earth.

I have many times expressed the opinion that quite often, the discussions on this subject are reminiscent of dialogues of the deaf. While in theory, all of us perceive the critical state of the issue and many actually do take initiatives or strive eagerly to contribute to its resolution, the problem remains and has not been corrected.

The saints of the Orthodox Church, having accomplished the purpose of their existence and participating in the divine glory, show and teach us the ecological idea. Thus St. Isaac the Syrian defines a merciful heart as “a heart burning for the whole creation, for people, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for all creatures.” As for Saint Cosmas of Aetolia, he prophesied that “people will become poor because they will not love trees.”

Therefore, the ecological problem is fundamentally a spiritual problem, with enormous moral dimensions. If we do not free ourselves from egocentrism and eudemonism (the belief that happiness is the test of right behavior), if we do not have an ascetic vision of creation and of our use of material goods and wealth, the ecological problem will spread, instead of being stopped. This is why the fundamental challenge of World Environment Day is for all to repent, to return to God the Creator, and to reintegrate ourselves in the perspective of the divine plan for creation and the environment.

HE Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, World Environment Day sermon,
Athens, Greece, June 4, 2019

Q

Why is care for the environment a spiritual problem?

How may we correct our relationship and interactions with God’s creation?

What is the ideal relationship that we as Christians should have with creation?

Reflection

The Orthodox Church and Ecological Problems

All of humanity is responsible for the state of nature - God's creation. Resource depletion and environmental pollution amid rising world populations raise this issue with special urgency for all nations to preserve the diversity of life, the diligent use of natural resources and the prevention of environmental disasters provoked by human activities.

The original fall resulted in a distortion of the primordial nature. Scripture testifies to this: "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but by the will of him who subjected it" (Rom. 8:20). Pollution and destruction of nature - a direct consequence of human sin - [become] its visible embodiment. Various manifestations of the sinful attitude toward nature, characteristic of modern "consumer society," places the main purpose of [human life as] making a profit. The only possibility to restore the health of nature is the spiritual rebirth of the individual and society, in a true Christian, ascetic man's relation to their own needs, curbing the passions, and consistent self-restraint....

Guided by God's commandment about keeping the created world (Genesis 2:15), and caring for its spiritual and physical health, the Russian Orthodox Church is committed to participate in discussion of environmental issues, to work in this field, and to participate in collaboration with all who are concerned about environmental thinking in maintaining health and a normal life.

HB Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and All Russia,
translation from Russian, Moscow, Russia, February 4, 2013

Q

What is the right and proper Christian way for humans to live on earth?

How might a deeper inward change of heart correct one's lifestyle?

What is required to "regain humility" and thereby recognize our limitations?

Reflection

Mobilizing a United Effort for the Earth

Christians must call upon humanity to come together in a united effort for the safeguarding of the earth and for its revitalization.... Yes, let us call humanity to a common task, drawn by the love of man as the image of God and of the universe as the creation of God.

It will be a common task if all Christians take part in it and share their experience and their hope, those of the West and those of the East, those of the North and those of the South....

Christians will act by giving a cosmic dimension to their prayer, their hearing of the Word, their sacramental life, and their asceticism. Christians will act by example, showing the cultural, social and ecological richness of traditional ascetic values when they open out onto history. Here, I am thinking above all of the voluntary limitation of our desires and needs along with a profound sympathy for all life.”

HB Patriarch + Ignatius IV of Antioch,
March 12, 1989

Q

What is the “righteous battle” regarding the environmental crisis?

What is the common task to which HB Patriarch Ignatius IV refers?

How can Orthodox Christians put their asceticism into action?

Reflection

Extending the Love of God

We live in critical times.... But our calling is truly ecumenical! We are committed to extending the love of God to every human person and indeed to all creation....

We offer this service, not because it is timely or popular, but because our relationship to the natural world is directly correlated to our relationship with our fellow human beings who inhabit it.

As we honor and respect the image of God in every human face, we must also honor the “creation of the world, by which the invisible things of [God] are clearly seen... even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20).

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Washington, DC,
November 3, 2009

Q

What is the love of God?

How can humans extend this to every person and all creation?

How are the invisible things of God “clearly seen”?

Reflection

Every Person is a Priest of God's Creation

In the Orthodox Church, behind whose tradition lie long battles against ancient Greco-Roman paganism, a spirituality involving a deep respect for nature is strongly conditioned by the view that nature acquires sacredness only in and through the human person.

This gives humanity decisive importance and responsibility. A human is the Priest of creation as he or she freely turns it into a vehicle of communion with God and fellow human beings. This means that material creation is not treated as a means of obtaining pleasure and happiness for the individual, but as a sacred gift from God which is meant to foster and promote communion with God and with others.

Such a 'liturgical' use of nature by human beings leads to forms of culture which are deeply respectful of the material world while keeping the human person at the center.

HE Metropolitan John of Pergamon,
"Production and Consumption,"
April, 1996

Q

Why do Orthodox Christians respect nature?

How is the human person a Priest of Creation? In practice what does this mean?

How may creation serve as a means of communion with God?

Reflection

We Share a Common Responsibility for the Earth

A special emphasis must be put on the spiritual and religious aspect [of improving the environment]....

One will meet ecological concerns from a religious point of view if one takes into account the words of Genesis which witness the spirit of God in creation.

It is in this sense that the Romanian people emerged in history as a Christian people, understanding God as a Sun that sends out light, life and love, the uncreated energies, over the whole of creation....

Both God's transcendence beyond creation and his immanence in creation are very important for the efforts we make for preserving the integrity of the environment.

HB Patriarch Teoctist, Romanian Orthodox Church,
Constanta, Romania, September 25, 1997

Q

What does it mean to meet ecological concerns from a religious perspective?

What are the teachings in Genesis that shape an Orthodox concern for creation?

How is it that we all bear responsibility for ecological destruction?

Reflection

A Eucharistic Vision of Creation

We wish to underscore that the destruction of the natural environment in our age is associated with human arrogance against nature and our domineering relationship toward the environment, as well as... a disposition of greed as a general attitude in life...

The sacramental and devotional life of the Church expresses a Eucharistic vision, approach and use of creation. Such a relationship with the world is incompatible with any indifference to creation—with every form of dualism that separates matter from spirit and undermines material creation. On the contrary, the Eucharistic experience sensitizes and mobilizes the believer toward environmentally-friendly action in the world.

In this spirit, the Orthodox Church has emphasized that in the sacraments of the Church, creation is affirmed and human beings are encouraged to act as stewards, protectors and ‘priests’ of creation, offering it in doxology to the Creator. Every form of abuse and destruction of creation, along with its transformation into an object of exploitation, constitutes a distortion of the spirit of the Christian gospel.

HAH, Day of Prayers for Creation, September 1, 2018

Q

What is the Orthodox Church’s Eucharistic vision of the world?

How does this vision shape an Orthodox way of life?

How is a eucharistic vision of lifestyle different from the secular vision?

Reflection

Ultimate Conclusions

Christianity has thrust man forward with a mission to explore and assume the universe, from the atom to the galaxy. Since the calling of Abraham and through the life-giving Cross, the world can no longer close in on itself; a tension about its ultimate conclusion now penetrates and runs through it. Science and modern technologies have developed in this openness, in this adventure born of a departure toward we know not where, born of the fool-like love of a God who has made us free by dying like a slave on the Cross.

Today the earth no longer encloses man in her stifling and fecund maternity. Man has broken the umbilical cord. He can separate himself from her, travel through the stratosphere, sojourn in space, even walk on the moon and send probes out to Mars.

What then will the earth be for him? An object, a collection of things, or a reservoir of resources which was long thought to be inexhaustible but now appears threatened by limits, imbalances, and even death. In parts of Europe and even in places quite near here the forest is dying of acid rain. Why and how have we come to this? Christianity stripped the world of its ancient sacred character, but this was in order to make it holy. Has Christianity betrayed its cosmic mission? Has it given up, abdicated its mission and withdrawn?

HB Patriarch +Ignatius IV of Antioch, Lucerne,
Switzerland, March 12, 1989

Q

How has Christianity fostered science and technology?

How has mankind broken the umbilical cord?

How and why is a clean earth important for humanity and its health?

Reflection

The Impacts of Climate Change Proliferate before Us

We stand against a background of grave pronouncements from scientists about the consequences of climate change for every living thing on earth. Global hunger has re-emerged on the world stage. How will we feed the world's people?

Climate change threatens Earth's ecosystems to meet the needs of present and future generations....

The potential impacts of climate change proliferate before us. We hear of air and water pollution, of global warming and the threatened extinction of numerous animal and plant species. Human suffering in the poorest countries increases; nowhere more vividly than in Africa, where global warming and human interference with ecosystems have brought a new threat to Africa's water and all who depend on it.... The evidence and statistics are indeed alarming. How should we react?

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Halki, 2017

Difficult Questions

In our efforts for the preservation of the natural environment, we must ask ourselves some difficult questions about our concern for other human beings.

Just how prepared we are to sacrifice our excessive lifestyles – as societies and as individuals – in order for others to enjoy the basic right to survive? When will we learn to say: “Enough!”?

How can we direct our focus away from what we want to what the world and our neighbor need?

Do we honestly do all that we can to leave as light a footprint as possible on this planet for the sake of others or for future generations?

If we constantly emphasize our freedom, then we must remember that caring is also one of the choices we are free to make. If we do not choose to care, then we are not simply indifferent onlookers. Where do you stand?

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Athens, Greece,
September 29, 2007

Q

Just what prevents cooperation in environmental action?

Is humanity ready for the sacrifice needed to begin substantive change?

Are we ready to care for others?

Reflection

An Immediate Duty for Orthodox Christians

We are all bound together by a deep concern and an active interest in the issues of the physical environment. ...

Various people, both within Albania as well as abroad, wonder and ask me why the Orthodox Church of Albania, which only a decade ago lay in total ruins, and which even today continues to have urgent inner needs, is so intensely involved in ecological projects. The answer is simple. An interest in the creation is an immediate duty for those who feel they have benefitted from God; it is a consequence of an Orthodox self-consciousness.

The horizon of Orthodoxy does not comprise only humankind. She has an immediate interest for the entire creation. Since the disturbance of the physical environment's equilibrium intensifies due to the careless actions of human beings, the Orthodox Church considers it her duty to invigorate – within her members and society in general – a sensitivity for the creation that suffers the worst exploitation of man's greed; to limit the consumer hysteria with a temperate “self-control” that forms an inseparable component of “the fruits of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22), and to cultivate an effective respect for the physical environment, stressing unceasingly that this is the work of the Triune God, who reveals the sacredness and liturgical role that all creatures have.

His Beatitude Archbishop ANASTASIOS, Primate, Albanian Orthodox Church,
Durrës, Albania, June 6, 2002

Q

How and why are we all bound together in a concern for the environment?

How broad is the horizon of Orthodox Christian concern?

Why do so many people develop an insatiable greed for acquisition?

Reflection

Program Announcements

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration thanks our Lord Jesus Christ for its ability to offer a series of new tools and programs to help you and your parish develop awareness of creation care.

The Face of God film

A film on Orthodox theology and its mandate on climate change will be released on January 6th, 2021 on the OFT's website www.FaceofGodfilm.org. Individuals may then view this film. Parishes can show it along with social distancing rules. This can become the basis for study group discussions or it may attract new members to your parish.

Help Wanted

We are seeking a website coordinator for online updates to our film website. Please inquire if you are familiar with website posting or are willing to learn.

Books

◆ *The Greening of the Orthodox Parish*

This is a comprehensive guide that provides vision and recommendations for what parishes and individuals can do to fulfill our Orthodox obligation to care for God's good earth. Available on www.Amazon.com

This 2020 Reading-a-day program ends with this current issue. Next, an article a month will be circulated for your reflection.

Websites

<https://www.Orth-Transfiguration.org>

<https://www.Facebook.com/christinthewildernessprogram/>

<https://www.faceofgodfilm.com/>

Donations solicited

These help the OFT promote our film and to help parishes identify Orthodox Christian solutions to our environmental challenges.

To donate, please see our **DONATE button** at the bottom of the page at

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