



Saint Apollinaris
Sixth Century

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

Proclaiming the Ecological Mission of the Orthodox Church as the Reconciliation of all Things in Christ

The Vision and Spiritual Direction of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

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

Based on the public statements of
His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
and other Orthodox Patriarchs and Hierarchs

Month Two
February 1-29, 2020

The OFT is endorsed by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States



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Introduction

This February edition of our creation care reading program focuses on the public statements of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other Orthodox patriarchs and hierarchs as they address our human duty to care for God's creation. These statements focus on how to extend the life of the Church into the life of the world.

This theme of respect and holy regard for God's creation has gone missing in many Orthodox parishes. This reading program seeks to remedy this omission by highlighting the theological commentary from our top hierarchs as they instruct us in our Christian responsibility to take good care of God's earth.

In this reading program we began by emphasizing two principled themes:

(1) "Let the Orthodox patriarchs become your teachers."

and

(2) "A reading a day to keep consumerism away."

These two concepts – the intentional reading and absorption of the teachings by our top Orthodox hierarchs combined with a rhythmic daily focus on their public statements will strengthen Christian disciples so that the application of our theology becomes better integrated into the habitual behavior of daily life. This is how a person may grow in Christ – through a step by step process of prayer, reading and application. This lays a foundation for spiritual growth and transformation.

Next, we add a third theme, a practical phrase often repeated by ship captains.

(3) "Steady as you go."

This phrase implies prayer, discipline, regularity, and steadiness of focus. If you wish to grow in Christ, intentionality is essential. The fathers teach that "tears" bring transformation. Tears mean that we mourn over past behavior and seek repentance, so strongly, that commitment to a more virtuous behavior and transformation result. To facilitate this process, these readings from our patriarchs and bishops offer vision, theology, direction and motivation toward right living in a new and changing world.

Besides, research and experience both show that the best way to embrace new behavior is to repeat and repeat a particular activity. In this way these readings offer a path to transformation. This allows us to absorb the mind of the Church as taught by our top hierarchs, and this in turn can reshape our thinking and behavior.

The Reading-a-Day editorial team

ES - EM - MR - FK

The Vision Which Connects

What does preserving the planet have to do with saving the soul? It is commonly assumed that climate change and the exploitation of nature's resources are matters that primarily concern politicians, scientists and technocrats....

Nevertheless, there are no two ways of looking at either the world or God. There is no distinction between concern for human welfare and concern for ecological preservation. The way we relate to nature as creation directly reflects the way we believe in God as Creator of all things. The sensitivity with which we handle the environment mirrors the sacredness that we reserve for the divine.

Moreover, scientists estimate that those most hurt by global warming in the years to come, are those who can least afford it. According to the Gospel of St. Matthew, the questions that will be asked of us at the final moment of accountability will not be about our religious observance but on whether we fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, comforted the sick, and cared for captives. ...

We are all in this together. Our planet unites us in a unique way. While we may differ in our conception of the origins or purpose of our world, ... surely we can all agree on our responsibility and obligation to protect its natural resources – which are neither limitless nor negotiable – for future generations.

It is not too late to respond.... We could steer the earth toward our children's future. Yet we can no longer afford to wait.... We have a choice to make. The time to choose is now.

HAH, Warsaw, Poland, November 14, 2013

Q

How is the saving of souls and the saving of the planet related?

What is human responsibility to God for the care of the earth?

What should guide Christians in our response to ecological problems?

Reflection

Compassion for Every Part of Creation

To be cared for by God and to care for God's creation entail having compassion for every living being and for every living thing. A compassionate heart, writes a seventh-century mystic, St. Isaac the Syrian: "Burns with love for the whole of creation – for human beings, for birds and beasts, for all of God's creatures."

So we need to be compassionate, which is to say full of passion and full of concern for every detail of God's creation. If we remain indifferent to humanity's injustice against the earth and its resources, if we are not involved in the correction of the abuse we cause to our planet, then we do not properly reflect God's care and concern for us and the whole world.

There are no excuses for our lack of interest and involvement. In our age, the information is readily at hand. We know the facts; the statistics are alarming. We can no longer remain apathetic to the cry of the poor and "the groaning of creation" (Rom. 8.22). As we well know, we are – all of us – so profoundly and intimately involved in and interconnected with each other's destiny. So we must choose to care.

Moreover, receiving care obliges us to provide care. Caretaking is a circle: of what we have received, we are called to give. We cannot hope to be nurtured by the environment if we do not nurture this environment in an intimate way. Therefore, in addition to compassion, we must recognize the importance of community. Far too long have we limited our understanding of community, reducing it to include only human beings. It is time that we extend this notion to include the living environment, to animals and to trees, to birds and to fishes. Embracing in compassion all people as well as all animal and inanimate creation brings good news and fervent hope to the whole world.

HAH, International Conference, Istanbul, June 30, 2004

Q

How can one acquire a compassionate heart?

What is the relationship between God's care for us and our care for the world?

Why are humans obliged to care for the world?

Reflection

Humanity's Place Between God and Creation

Only when man accepts the teaching of our Church, that the Creator of all things is God, can he love the whole of Creation and protect it.

Man, as the crown of creation, has a special place on our planet. Man is invited by God to continue the work of creation, and simultaneously to look after it, to take care of it and to push for its advancement to whatever protects it as far as its survival is concerned. Hence God, in the first book of the Old Testament, the book of Genesis, invites the first man, Adam, to give names to the animals and to all things. This symbolic Biblical reference shows precisely our responsibilities to the whole of God's creation.

In order to respect God's creation we must become conscious of the fact that everything in the world belongs to God who created it. Consequently, we human beings are, under no circumstance, the proprietors of God's creation. Rather we are people who accept his commandments – His management. Hence, what is created... leads us to awe and respect. We become conscious of the fact that we have a serious role to act for the protection of the environment, which we all owe to the Creator, that is, to God.

For this reason, the ecological problem is connected to the problem of abuse of God's creation, which is "the house of God." Hence, the whole of creation, the entire environment, our planet and whatever exists on it is in this sense, God's wider habitation in which there exists and lives God's divine creation. Man, as an inseparable part of this wider habitation of God, must be protected in every way, his dignity and his human rights. The same applies to every part of creation. In this way, we show, special reverence to the entity of the Creator, the Three Divine Entities of the Triad God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

HE Archbishop Seraphim of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All-Africa, September 1, 2019

Q

How does love of God relate to the keeping of the commandments?

What does it mean that humans are the "crown of creation"?

How is God's creation also "the house of God"?

Reflection

Responsibility for the World's Future

We, along with all the rest of humanity are responsible for the future of our planet and for human life on this planet. ... For example, scientists expect that in the coming decades the average temperature on the surface of the earth will increase by several degrees. This will result in the melting of polar ice, the raising of the sea level, greater rainfall and floods in colder regions, and more drought and deserts in warmer regions....

Accordingly, any incident of pollution in one region of the atmosphere is shared throughout the world.... The consequences of a polluting action eventually will affect every person throughout the world, including the responsible perpetrator, as well as a boundless number of innocent victims. It is impossible for perpetrators to protect themselves from the consequences of their actions, and it is impossible to know who will ultimately be the victims of such actions. However, humanity as a whole is damaged by every such action....

Similarly, we would like to emphasize the worldwide effect of every change in the spiritual attitude and conduct of each and every citizen in regard to the environment; we must conclude that every effort to change the attitude of citizens, even if it appears to have only limited efficacy, has profound significance for the environment.

HAH, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 15, 2000

Q

Why should the people today care about the future of the earth?

How is pollution of the planet a spiritual issue?

What should a faithful Christian's responsibility be in this situation?

Reflection

Hope through Personal Responsibility

Our effort over the last two decades has been to promote dialogue and cooperation among various disciplines and faiths, contributing to global awareness and discerning changes in attitude and lifestyle related to the ecological crisis....

We are convinced that any real hope of reversing climate change and addressing environmental pollution requires a radical transformation of the way we perceive and treat our planet.... All of us are frustrated with the stubborn resistance and reluctant advancement of earth-friendly policies and practices.

Permit us to propose that perhaps the reason for this hesitation and hindrance may lie in the fact that we are unwilling to accept personal responsibility and demonstrate personal sacrifice. In the Orthodox Christian tradition, we refer to this “missing dimension” as *ascesis*, which could be translated as abstinence and moderation, or – better still – simplicity and frugality. The truth is that we resist any demand for self-restraint and self-control.

HAH, Halki, Turkey, June 12, 2012

Q

What does it mean to assume personal responsibility for the earth?

Why is there resistance to change that might improve our situation?

How do self-restraint and self-control relate to care for the planet?

Reflection

The Spirit of Liturgy

If we are guilty of relentless waste, it is because we have lost the spirit of liturgy and worship. We are no longer respectful pilgrims on this earth; we have been reduced to careless consumers or passing travelers.

How tragic it would be, for us all, if we were simply to pass through the Amazon, like the indifferent priest in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We must be responsible and responsive citizens of the world; we must be careful and caring pilgrims in this land. If we are not in fact moved to compassion, bandaging the wounds of the earth, assuming personal care, and contributing to the painful costs, then we might easily be confronted with the question, which of these do you resemble: the Good Samaritan or the indifferent priest?

The liturgy guides us to a life that sees more clearly and shares more fairly, moving away from what we want as individuals to what the world needs globally. This in turn requires that we move away from greed and control and gradually value everything for its place in creation and not simply its economic value to us, thereby restoring the original beauty of the world, seeing all things in God and God in all things.

HAH, Manaus, Brazil, July 14, 2006

Q

What is the key lesson in the parable of the Good Samaritan?

Why is wasting things of the earth wrong?

How does the liturgy encourage us to respect creation?

Reflection

Responsibility for the Health of the Planet

Esteemed dignitaries and fellow participants, perhaps for the first time in the history of our world, we recognize that our decisions and choices immediately impact the environment. Today, we are able to direct our actions in a caring and compassionate way. It is up to us to shape our future; it is up to us to choose our destiny.

Breaking the vicious circle of ecological degradation is a choice with which we are uniquely endowed, at this crucial moment in the history of our planet.

This conference is a golden opportunity for us to recognize the unique role of every individual and every organization, in order that we may respect those more vulnerable in this situation, and in order that we may be prepared to assume responsibility for the health of our planet, an issue of critical significance and urgency.

HAH, Manaus, Brazil, July 14, 2006

Q

How might your actions harm the earth and cause ecological degradation?

How might you respect or harm people far away through your actions?

In what ways by your actions can you respect people far away?

Reflection

The Divine Economy

Every product we make and enjoy (from the paper we work with, to processed meat and the soy beans that sustain its industry), every tree we fell, every building we construct, every road we travel, definitively and permanently alters creation. At the basis of this alteration — or perhaps we should characterize it as abuse — of creation is a fundamental difference between human, natural, and divine economies.

In the Orthodox tradition, the phrase "divine economy" is used to describe God's extraordinary acts of love and providence toward humanity and creation. "Economy" is derived from the Greek word "oikonomia," which implies the management of an environment or household (oikos), which is also the root of the word "ecology" (oikologia).

Let us consider, however, the radical distinction between the various kinds of economy. Our economy tends to use and discard; natural economy is normally cyclical and replenishes; God's economy is always compassionate and nurturing. Nature's economy is profoundly violated by our wasteful economy, which in turn constitutes a direct offence to the divine economy.

The prophet Ezekiel again recognized this abuse of the natural eco-systems when he observed: Is it not enough to feed on good pasture? Must you also trample the rest with your feet? Is it not sufficient to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (34,18).

HAH, Manaus, Brazil, July 14, 2006

Q

How is God's natural economy different from the financial economy?

How can we bring God's natural replenishing economy into our lives?

How might we apply the Prophet Ezekiel's principle in our lives?

Reflection

Perspective on the Ecological Crisis from Russia

The ecological crisis compels us to review our relationship with the environment. Today the concept of man's dominion over nature and the consumer attitude toward it has been increasingly criticized. The awareness that contemporary society pays too high a price for the blessings of civilization has provoked opposition to economic egotism. Thus, attempts are made to identify the causes of damage to the natural environment.

At the same time, a system of protection is being developed and economic policies are being reviewed; technologies which are power-saving are being created and waste-free plants which can fit into the natural circulation [of the environment].

Ecological ethics are being developed and public awareness is emerging that speaks against the consumer way of life, demanding that the moral and legal responsibility for the damage inflicted on nature be enhanced. This ethic is also introducing ecological education and training and calls for joined efforts in protecting the environment on the basis of broad international co-operation.

His Beatitude Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia,
"The Russian Orthodox Social Concept," June 1, 2012

Q

What are the causes of damage to the environment?

How do we develop a vigilance for the preservation of nature?

What are environmental ethics? How do they help protect the environment?

Reflection

The Purpose of Human Existence

The purpose of human existence is for us Christians to imitate the way of existence of the Trinitarian God; to come to communion with this God and to live eternally with Him in love.

However, in order to achieve this goal, we must go through society and love our fellow human beings. The way toward theosis (or divinization) is ascetic discipline, which occurs through purification from passion and the practice of love. Such ascetic discipline is expressed in manifold ways, but its basic and fundamental way of expression is philanthropy.

For us Christian Orthodox, philanthropy derives from our unity with God and consequently with all humanity. The unity of each person with all humanity implies the acceptance that every human being is entitled to participate equally in the divine gifts of creation.

HAH, Istanbul, March 3, 2013

Q

What are the implications of our human purpose in terms of society?

How may a person come to communion with God?

Why are you entitled to participate in the divine gifts of creation?

Reflection

Our Original Privilege

To imagine a world that functions in beauty and harmony, balance and purpose, in accordance with the overflowing love of God, is to cry out in wonder with the Psalmist, “*How great are Your works, O Lord; In Wisdom you have made them all.*”

Our original privilege and calling as human beings lies precisely in our ability to appreciate the world as God's gift.... Our original sin with regard to the natural environment lies – not in any legalistic transgression, but – precisely in our refusal to accept the world as a sacrament of communion with God and neighbor. We have been endowed with a passion for knowledge and wisdom, which open before us boundless worlds of the microcosm and the macrocosm, and present us with boundless challenges of creative action and intervention. ...

Then, we are able to embrace all – not with fear or necessity, but with love and joy. Then, we care for the plants and the animals, for the trees and the rivers, for the mountains and the seas, for all human beings and the whole natural environment. Then, we discover joy – rather than inflicting sorrow – in our life and in our world. Then, we are creating instruments of life and not tools of death.

Then, creation on the one hand and humanity on the other hand, the one that encompasses and the one that is encompassed, cooperate and correspond. Then, they are no longer in contradiction or in conflict. Then, just as humanity offers creation in an act of priestly service and sacrifice to God, so also does creation offer itself in return as a gift to humanity. Then, everything becomes an exchange, an abundance, and a fulfillment of love. It is our sincere hope that our hearts may receive and return the natural environment to the Divine Creator with gratitude. It is our fervent prayer that our hands may minister to this divine gift of the environment in a celebration of thanksgiving. Amen.

HAH, Presentation of the Sophie Prize, Oslo, Norway, June 12, 2002

Q

How is the world a sacrament of communion with God?

What does HAH say is our original calling?

What does HAH say is our original sin with regard to the environment?

Reflections

A Sacramental Relationship

If the earth is sacred, then our relationship with the natural environment is sacramental; that is to say, it contains the seed and trace of God. In many ways, the “sin of Adam” is precisely his refusal to receive the world as a gift of communion with God and with the rest of creation. St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans emphasizes the consequences of the Fall, observing that *“from the beginning till now, the entire creation, which as we know has been groaning in pain”* (Rom. 8.22), *“awaits with eager longing this revelation by the children of God”* (Rom. 8.19).

It is from this fundamental belief in the sacredness and beauty of creation that the Orthodox Church proceeds to articulate the concept of transfiguration. This emphasis of Orthodox theology on personal and cosmic metamorphosis is especially apparent in its liturgical feasts. The Feast of Christ’s Transfiguration, celebrated on August 6th, highlights the sacredness of all creation, which offers a foretaste of the final resurrection and restoration of all things in the age to come. The Homilies of St. Macarius underline this connection between the Transfiguration of Christ and the sanctification of human nature:

“Just as the Lord’s body was glorified, when he went up the (Tabor) mountain and was transfigured into glory and into infinite light ... so, too, our human nature is transformed into the power of God, being kindled into fire and light” (St. Macarius, Homily XV, 38).

HAH, Utrecht, The Netherlands, April 24, 2014

Q

What does it mean to see the world as a gift of communion with God?

In what ways do we inherit the sin of Adam and Eve?

How can we overcome that ancestral sin and find genuine communion with God?

Reflection

Humans Have a Eucharistic Role in Earth

The experience of the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been one of continuity and stability through centuries of global change. At one time, our Patriarchate was co-terminus with the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Today, as the 270th successor to the First-Called Disciple, Saint Andrew, our domain is a ministry of spiritual leadership, but our Center is in the same topos we have known from the Apostolic Age. Our mission embraces Orthodox Christians on every continent....

In the teaching of our Church, nature is perceived as being full of the glory of God, even though it groans with the rest of creation, awaiting the revelation of our redemption (cf. Romans 8:22-23).

Humankind is seen as the nexus of creation, the point of convergence that mediates the cosmos, which was created as "very good," for the glory of God.

Humanity has a meditative, and indeed, a eucharistic role in exercising dominion over the earth. This is a far cry from domination, and the exploitation which has characterized the technologically capable, post-industrialist era.

HAH, World Affairs Council, Los Angeles, Calif, November 7, 1997

Q

Why do we say that nature is full of the glory of God?

How do humans have a "eucharistic role" in their exercise of dominion?

What does this mean? How might you exercise this aspect of faith in your life?

Reflection

The Liturgy Teaches Us How to See

The liturgy, the Eucharistic assembly of the Church, provides for us a mystical basis for a broader, spiritual worldview. This worldview is neither a political plan nor an economic strategy. It is essentially a way of reflecting on what it means to perceive the world through the lens of the soul.

Seeing clearly is precisely what the liturgy teaches us to do. It enables us to hear new sounds and behold new images. It creates in us a mystical appreciation and genuine affection for everything that surrounds us. The truth is that we have been inexorably locked within the self-centered confines of our own individual concerns with no access to the world beyond us. We have violated the sacred covenant between ourselves, our world, and our God and now this is being reflected around the world.

The liturgy restores this covenant; it reminds us of another way and of another world. It provides for us another means of comprehension and communication. The liturgy is the eternal celebration of the fragile beauty of this world. It is this fragile beauty that brings us all together as a global community, but this fragility also makes the world susceptible to our actions.

HAH, World Health Organization, May 30, 2008

Q

What can a person learn from the Divine Liturgy?

How does the Liturgy teach us how to see?

How does the Liturgy bring us all together?

Reflection

The True Nature of the Ecological Crisis

It is imperative that the true nature of the ecological crisis be understood. The relationship between individuals or communities and the environment can never be detached from their relationship with God. When man “turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order” (Message from Pope John Paul II for the 1990 World Day of Peace, #5).

Ecological irresponsibility is at heart a moral problem - founded upon an anthropological error - which arises when man forgets that his ability to transform the world must always respect God's design of creation (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 37).

Precisely because of the essentially moral nature of the [ecological] problem, it is proper that religious, civic and political leaders, alongside expert representatives of the scientific community, confront the environmental challenges...

Similarly, solutions to this problem will necessarily involve acts of solidarity which transcend political divisions or unnecessarily narrow industrial self-interests.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Message before
HH Pope John Paul II,” Vatican City, May 27, 2003

Q

Why is ecological responsibility a moral issue?

How can development happen and still respect God’s design for creation?

Why must solutions to this problem involve a solidarity in society?

Reflection

A Crusade 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

Custodians of Creation

We, as Christians, taught by the Holy Tradition and by the experience of the Holy Church Fathers, link always the mentioned [conference] theme “Man - Custodian of Creation” with the need of repentance. When man fell, due to his sin, he lost his identity. Because of his tendency toward transgression, man became weak and cannot find in himself strength to go back to his Creator. Man accepts God's love and becomes a being of communication, a being as communion, improving, with all the Saints, his God-likeness.

So man becomes the custodian of the creation which is created by the will of God for the only reason - to become one in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1, 22-23; 4,15). The human being is called to protect the work of God's hands because the deeds of God protect [nurture] him. The creation needs for its existence God, as it cannot exist by itself. Man is searching for eternity and he is determined to care for the conjunction of unity and differences. Love disables divisions, while the Spirit assembles all.

We are profoundly hurt by the divisions in witnessing the Christian truth before the modern world which is yearning for spiritual direction and the meaning of the mystery of life. We are firmly convinced that the theme for the 20th International Conference in Your monastery is for the good, benefit and joy of all Christians.

His Beatitude Irinej, Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgarde-Karlovci and Patriarch of Serbia, August 31, 2012

Q

What does it mean that at the Fall humans lost their identify?

How are humans custodians of creation?

Why do you think there are divisions in the Christian world?

Reflection

Original Sin and the Environment

To imagine a world that functions in beauty and harmony, balance and purpose, in accordance with the overflowing love of God, is to cry out in wonder with the Psalmist, “How great are Your works, O Lord; You have fashioned all things in wisdom.”

Our original privilege and calling as human beings lies precisely in our ability to appreciate the world as God's gift to us. And our original sin with regard to the natural environment lies – not in any legalistic transgression, but – precisely in our refusal to accept the world as a sacrament of communion with God and neighbor.

We have been endowed with a passion for knowledge and wisdom, which open before us boundless worlds of the microcosm and the macrocosm, and present us with boundless challenges of creative action and intervention.

HAH, Oslo, Norway, June 12, 2002

Q

What is wonder? How can a person cultivate and encounter it?

What does it mean to refuse the world as a sacrament of communion?

How can the world become a sacrament of communion?

Reflection

Learn from the Saints of the Church

It is crucial that we learn from the early Fathers and Mothers of the Church, that we embrace the mind of the early Church by immersing ourselves in the spirit of the Christian classics.

At the same time, we should turn our attention to the future, to the age to come, toward the heavenly kingdom... an eschatological vision offers a way out of the impasse of provincialism and confessionalism.

HAH, Koympari, Crete, October 7 2009

Within the unimpaired natural environment, humanity discovers spiritual peace and rest; and in humanity that is spiritually cultivated, and that possesses the grace of God and inner peace, nature recognizes its Lord and companion. The Orthodox Church has always encouraged humanity to respect the works of God, while the saints are considered the best friends of creation.

HAH, Sydney Town Hall, Australia, November 26, 1996

Q

What can we learn from the lives and writings of the saints?

What can Christians learn from nature?

Why are the saints called “the best friends of creation”?

Reflection

A Moral and Spiritual Problem

Climate change and environmental pollution affect everyone. While the data may be variously debated, the situation is clearly unsettling. To take but one example: dramatic increases of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere – largely due to fossil fuel burning – are causing global warming and in turn leading to melting ice caps, rising sea levels, the spread of disease, drought and famine.

The European heat-wave of 2003 could be unusually cool by 2060, while the 150,000 people that the World Health Organization conservatively estimates are already dying annually due to climate change will be but a fraction of the actual number...

Religious leaders throughout the world recognize that climate change is much more than an issue of environmental preservation. Insofar as it is human-induced, it is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem. To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is no less than suicidal, jeopardizing the diversity of the very earth that we inhabit, enjoy and share. It has rightly been described as a sin against God and creation. After all, a handful of affluent nations account for two thirds of global GDP and half of all global carbon dioxide emissions.

Ecological degradation also constitutes a matter of social and economic justice. For those who will most directly and severely be affected by climate change will be the poorer and more vulnerable nations (what Christian Scriptures refer to as our "neighbor") as well as the younger and future generations (the world of our children and of our children's children). Those of us living in more affluent nations either consume or else corrupt far too much of the earth's resources.

HAH, Aichi, Japan, September 20, 2005

Q

How is climate change a sin against God and creation?

What is the means by which humans are the cause of climate change?

How can these problems be avoided?

Reflection

Acknowledge the Consequences of Our Choices

While many of us in more affluent societies unfortunately cannot comprehend the consequences of climate change due to our comfortable, if not complacent and complicit circumstances, the more vulnerable among us... fully understand the dire situation as they witness the rising sea levels consume their home and threaten their survival.

Still, we are all called constantly to remember that what we put into our waters is as harmful as what we take out of the oceans. The way that we pollute our oceans – whether intentionally through non-biodegradable waste or else inadvertently through precipitation – is as destructive as our practices of overfishing and harvesting of particular fish populations in a manner faster than they can naturally reproduce.

Moreover, basic human rights are also at risk when we do not protect the oceans. The way we defile the oceans is plainly reflected in the way we exploit their resources, which in turn is directly related to the way we treat our fellow human beings, particularly the more marginalized and less fortunate of our brothers and sisters.

Nonetheless, if we have created the dire conditions that we now face, we are equally accountable for and capable of remedying the health of our environment. Each of us can and must appreciate the way in which our individual and collective lifestyles impact the environment; we can and must acknowledge the harmful consequences of our material choices; indeed, we can and must assume responsibility for positive and permanent change.

HAH, Message for World Oceans Day, June 8, 2015

Q

What is required to respect the environment?

How can we remember to have a responsible relationship to the world?

Is a person responsible for unintended destructive impacts upon the earth?

Reflection

Preserve Creation from Harm

According to the Church Fathers, a merciful heart will not only seek the heavenly kingdom and sense that it has no abiding city here on earth; it also cannot tolerate any harm to animals and plants, even to the inanimate elements to nature.... Such a spirit should characterize every Christian.

We do not limit our expectations to this world; nor do we abandon our pursuit of the heavenly reality, namely the divine kingdom. Instead, we recognize that the way that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem goes through the keeping of the divine commandments during our temporary sojourn in this world. Therefore, we are careful to keep the original commandment to preserve creation from all harm, both for our own sake and for the sake of our fellow human beings.

In any case, respect for the material and natural creation of God, as well as indirectly for all people who are affected by the environment, reveals a sensitivity in human attitudes and conduct that should be characteristic of every Christian.

HAH, Day of Prayer for the Environment, September 1, 1997

Q

Which of the commandments about creation are we expected to keep?

Why does respect for creation reveal our attitude about God?

What specific things show respect for the creation?

Reflection

Orthodox Christianity Faces the Modern World

Although the time we have been on the planet is insignificant in the context of the life of the planet, we have reached a defining moment....

Having struggled for centuries to escape the tyranny of hunger, disease, and want, the technological advances of the last century have created the illusion of us being in control of our destiny as never before. We have cracked the code of DNA, we can create life in test tubes, we can genetically modify crops, we can put men on the moon – but we have lost our balance, externally and within.... The explosion of knowledge has not been accompanied by an increase in wisdom. Only wisdom could make us realize that the Creation is an interdependent, undivided whole, not an assemblage of isolated, unrelated parts.... Even the smallest human intervention in the natural order by human action, can have – and does have - long term effects on the planet.

In addition to seeking balance between ourselves and our environment, we need to find balance within ourselves, reassessing our values as well as what is valuable. Let us remember, we all have our part to play, our sacred responsibility to the future. And let us remember that our responsibility grows alongside our privileges.... Our decisions, personal and collective, determine the future of the planet.

As we... explore the challenges faced by local communities, let us search for solutions from the perspective of Faith, mindful that we are all in the same fragile boat of life – that we are living defining moments in history, and that we are living them together in Truth, in Love, in Hope and above all, in Responsibility.

HAH, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 21, 2009

Q

Has the modern world changed the way people relate to God? What is different?

How is wisdom different in comparison to knowledge? How is wisdom acquired?

How can Orthodox Christianity provide solutions to modern problems?

Reflection

Putting our Own Houses in Order

Africa is the continent least responsible for global warming, yet bearing the most detrimental consequences, while also being the least equipped to cope with the changes. Harvest cycles in Ethiopia and other parts of eastern and southern Africa are shortening, leading to further food insecurity for the world's poorest people. Elevated temperatures create incalculable increase in the range of vector-borne diseases and lack of clean water.

Populations affected by fatal diseases, such as malaria, schistosomiasis, dengue fever and cholera, are rising dramatically. Even a conservative estimate indicates the number of people impacted by flooding could increase from 1 million (in 1990) to 70 million (by as early as 2080)....

Faith communities must first put their own houses in order; their adherents must embrace the urgency of the issue. This process has already begun throughout the world, although it must be expanded and intensified. Religions realize the primacy of the need for a change deep within people's hearts. They are also emphasizing the connection between spiritual commitment and moral ecological practice. Faith communities are well-placed to take a long-term view of the world as God's creation. In theological jargon, that is called "eschatology." Moreover, we have been taught that we are judged on the choices we make.

HAH, Aichi, Japan, September 20, 2005

Q

How might Orthodox Christians embrace the urgency of the climate issue?

What does this require in specific terms and actions?

What does moral ecological practice involve?

Reflection

Love God, Love the Creation

Our love for nature does not seek to idolize it; rather, our love for it stems from our love for the Creator who grants it to us. This love is expressed through offering in thanksgiving of all things to God, to whom we, having been reconciled through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:19), enjoy also our reconciliation with nature.

Without our reconciliation with God, the forces of nature find themselves in opposition to us. We already experience consequences of this and are subjected to them. Therefore, in order to avert the escalation of evil and to correct that which may already have taken place, and in order to suspend the penalty, we are obligated to accept the fact that we need to be accountable consumers of nature and not arbitrary rulers of it. We must also accept the fact that, in the final analysis, the demand placed on nature to use its powers to destroy our fellow man, whom we might consider useless, will result in our facing the same consequences.

HAH, The Phanar, September 1, 1998

We invite you to join... in pledging to protect the
[earth and the] oceans as an act of devotion....
If we love God, we must love His creation.

HAH, Stockholm, Sweden, June 7, 2003

Q

How do we express our love of God in relation to the earth?

What does it mean to be “accountable consumers of nature”?

What is the relation between God and the creation?

Reflection

Sacrificing Selfishness

The natural environment was created by God to be friendly and of service to the needs of humankind. However, owing to Man's original disobedience, the natural harmony and balance of the environment was disrupted and due to persistent disobeying of God's commandments, it continues to disrupt, leading to total disarray and disharmony.

Therefore, the prayer that we offer up to the Lord for the protection of the natural environment should first of all be a prayer for the repentance of humans, who through misjudged, thoughtless, and sometimes arrogant actions directly or indirectly provokes most, not to say all, natural catastrophes.

Our Lord who taught us the Lord's Prayer, includes in it a promise that accompanies a request "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This has a broader meaning. Our prayer should be accompanied by a corresponding sacrifice, mainly a sacrifice of our selfishness and arrogant pursuits, which demonstrate our insolent attitude towards the Creator and His wisely stipulated natural and spiritual laws. This change of attitude is called repentance. Only if our prayer to God for the protection of the environment is accompanied by a corresponding repentance, will it be effective and welcomed by God.

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us reconsider our lives and let us repent for everything we do mistakenly and against the wise laws of God, in order to be heard by Him, begging His kindness to maintain the natural environment, friendly and undamaged for humankind.

HAH, The Phanar, September 1, 2003

Q

What is repentance?

How does it apply to our habitual behavior that involves earth and society?

Does society also need to repent of actions that defile the creation?

Reflection

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Special thanks are due to Eleni Rose Collard, Elizabeth Mace and Marc Richardson at the Saint Seraphim Orthodox Church in Santa Rosa, California for reviewing this text and assembling the mailing of materials.

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The OFT Mission Statement

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration exists to hallow God's Name "on earth as it is in heaven" by seeking the transfiguration of creation through the activation of the Christian calling toward transfigured life. In the context of the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, the Fellowship seeks to extend the transfiguring activity of the sacraments into all creation through ascetic practice, the keeping of the commandments and the acquisition of virtue, thus restoring the beauty and integrity of God's earthly temple.

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