



The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

A Daily Reading Program on the Christian Theology of Creation

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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 Eleven
November 1-30, 2020

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration is an Affiliated Ministry
of The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA



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Introduction

We are now eleven months into this reading-a-day series from the Orthodox patriarchs and hierarchs. We have read their statements that show a unified view on creation care, based on Scripture, the Fathers, theology and our current leaders. This “cloud of witnesses” reveals that Orthodox hierarchs are astute in discerning the root causes of our global ecological plight, that the crisis is urgent, and that it results from a lifestyle out of harmony with the earth and particularly out of harmony with God and Jesus Christ.

We also know that we are called to take good care of God’s earth. Nevertheless a chasm exists in Orthodox parishes, and to some extent across all society, between knowing what is right, and living out that truth in our daily lives. That has always been the great human spiritual struggle, but now we face new challenges and urgency.

Our foremost obstacle is that we live within a godless secular culture and to some extent are captive to its worldview. This culture is characterized by consumerism which is composed of a basket of heretical concepts. These include individualism, materialism, secularism, and commercialism, and these are layered upon the ancient sins of pride, greed, envy and lust. Significantly in schools of advertising and salesmanship, these vices are recognized as the keys to successful product sales. In other words those qualities, once called the deadly sins, are today the pathways to successful mass marketing.

The Church offers solutions to defeat these assaults on our hearts and minds. But we have to understand how and why we are handicapped by this culture. Our hierarchs teach that we must recognize that we each have a calling to serve as “priests of creation.”

If we fail to exercise this calling, we easily fall into a new captivity, certainly more subtle than the historic Ottoman or the communist captivity, yet no less pernicious to the life of the Church and its ability to transmit the blessings of Jesus Christ to the world. Even worse, this captivity is leading to the pollution and collapse of the entire planet.

How do we address this new captivity? What are our tools? What is our vision and strategic plan? Yes, we actually have one! On the following pages, the Orthodox patriarchs, speaking in harmony and one mind, lay out the steps by which we may defeat consumerism. When their individual guidances are connected together, something surprising emerges. They articulate a pathway, even a comprehensive plan and inspired strategy, by which the Orthodox Church is providing spiritual direction for addressing the pernicious force of consumerism and its product global climate change. Diagram their respective commentaries and there it is! The inspired Orthodox plan for addressing global climate change.

Yours in Christ’s service,

MR - EM - ER - FK

Facing the World's Energy Challenge

There is no single solution to the present energy challenge. We do not have to sacrifice economic security to assure environmental health. Prudence – the application of moral principle in service to the common good – should guide us to meet immediate needs in such a way as to enhance, not diminish future sustainability. And where there are genuine risks to health and well-being, the principle of precaution should guide our actions.

More investment in renewable energy and fuel efficiency is now a moral imperative especially because these are technologically feasible and economically viable. Energy conservation is prudent human action.

These concerns have entirely unprecedented moral urgency in the 21st century. In its reliance on fossil fuels, American energy policy is a cause of global climate change. With less than 5% of the world's population, our nation is generating more than 22% of greenhouse gas emissions. The United States has a moral responsibility to lead a transition to a new sustainable global energy system. Everything we do to assure safe and sustainable energy domestically must at the same time promote it internationally. We must join in binding international agreements which set energy conservation targets and timetables. Preventing climate change is a preeminent expression of faithfulness to our Creator God. Energy conservation is global leadership and solidarity.

HE Archbishop Demitrios, GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA;

HE Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), Archdiocese of North America, ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX Church;

HE Metropolitan Christopher, President, Episcopal Council (SCOBA),
SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE USA AND CANADA;

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SYRIAN ORTHODOX (Malankara) CHURCH OF ANTIOCH;

HB Metropolitan Theodosius, THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA;

Joint statement: "Moral Reflection on Energy Policy and Global Warming,"
February, 2002

Q

Why is energy policy a moral and even a spiritual issue?

Why, as the bishops say, is Energy conservation "prudent human action"?

How has American energy policy been a cause of global climate change?

Reflection

The Meaning of Christian Asceticism

Asceticism has been associated with a devaluation of matter for the sake of 'higher' and more 'spiritual' things. This implies a Platonic view of matter and the body, which is not compatible with the Christian tradition.... Such types of asceticism, involving a devaluation or contempt of the material world, aggravates instead of solves the ecological crisis.

An 'ecological asceticism' begins with deep respect for the material creation, including the human body. It builds upon the view that we are not possessors of creation, but are called to turn it into a vehicle of communion, always respecting its possibilities and limitations.

Human beings must realize that natural resources are not unlimited. Creation is finite and so are the resources that nature can provide. The consumerist philosophy seems to ignore this truth. We encourage growth and consumption by making 'necessary' things which previous generations could easily live without. We need to reconsider our concept of quality of life. Quality does not need quantity to exist. A restriction in our use of natural resources can lead to a life that is happier than the endless competition of spending and acquiring more and more. Qualitative growth must replace the prevailing conception of economic development.... Asceticism must become synonymous with qualitative instead of quantitative progress in society.

All this would involve major redefinitions in political, economic and social institutions. Such a reorientation of our culture requires the involvement and cooperation of all the factors responsible for forming it. It would require a change in people's deeper convictions and motivations, since no human being can sacrifice anything without a reason or motive.

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

Q

What is Christian asceticism? Can you explain it?

Why is ascesis beneficial and preferable to the consumerist way of life?

What is the example that we receive from the life of Jesus Christ?

Reflection

The Duty of Every Christian

Every Christian is called to be a steward, protector and “priest” of creation, offering it by way of doxology to the Creator.

We must recall that climate change is an issue closely related to our current model of economic development. An economy that ignores human beings and human needs inevitably leads to an exploitation of the natural environment. Nevertheless, we continue to threaten humanity’s existence and deplete nature’s resources in the name of short-term profit and benefit. How can we possibly imagine a sustainable development that comes at the expense of the natural environment?

There is always a tangible and local dimension to caring for creation. Preserving and protecting the natural environment, as well as respecting and serving our fellow human beings. These are two sides of one and the same coin. The consequences of the ecological crisis—which affect, first and foremost, the socially and economically vulnerable—are a serious threat for social cohesion and integration.

Moreover, there is an intimate link between caring for creation and worshipping the Creator, between an economy for the poor and an ecology for the planet. When we hurt people, we harm the earth. So, our extreme greed and excessive waste are not only economically unacceptable; they are ecologically unsustainable. This is how we must interpret the Lord’s words in the parable of the last judgment: “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink” (Matt. 25.35).

Dear friends, all of us are called to challenge—but also to change—the way that we consume in order to learn how to conserve for the sake of our planet and for the benefit of its people. When we con-serve, we recognize that we must serve one another. “Con-serving” implies sharing our concern for the earth and its inhabitants. It signifies the ability to see in our neighbor—and in every other person—the face of every human being and ultimately the face of God. Otherwise, we cannot say that we demonstrate compassion for our planet and our neighbor, or that we really care about the world’s resources and communities.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Athens, June 5, 2018

Q

What is a “priest of creation”?

In what ways does this apply to you?

How are we given tools by God to address consumerism?

Reflection

Frugality and Simplicity Needed to Face Climate Change

Global Climate Change has been on the Eastern Orthodox Christian agenda for over twenty five years. In 1989 Ecumenical Patriarch +Dimitrios began to raise the alarm when he observed “scientists... warn us of the danger of the phenomena of the greenhouse whose first indications have already been noted.”

In a letter to the 2013 Warsaw Climate Summit, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew brought a further cause of climate change into focus: “Excess consumption.” Humanity’s reckless consumption of earth’s resources threatens us with irreversible climate change. Burning more fuel than we need, we contribute to droughts or floods thousands of miles away.

To restore the planet we need a spiritual worldview which cultivates frugality and simplicity, humility and respect. We must constantly be aware of the impact of our actions on creation. We must direct our focus away from what we want to what the planet needs. We must care for creation. Otherwise, we do not really care about anything at all.

In our efforts to contain global warming, we are demonstrating how prepared we are to sacrifice our selfish and greedy lifestyles. When will we learn to say: “Enough!”? When will we understand how important it is to leave as light a footprint as possible for the sake of future generations?

HE Archbishop Seraphim of Zimbabwe, Patriarchate
of Alexandria and All Africa, June 18, 2014

Q

Why is excess consumption harmful to the world?

What is required in our attitudes to restrain consumption?

What is our individual responsibility in restraining consumption?

Reflection

The Commandment to “Love the Trees”

On the Holy Mountain of Athos, the monks sometimes put up beside the forest paths special signposts, offering encouragement or warning to the pilgrims. One such notice used to give me particular pleasure. Its message was *“Love the trees.”*

Fr. Amphilochios, the "elder" on the Island of Patmos when I first stayed there, would have been in full agreement. “Do you know,” he said, “that God gave us one more commandment, which is not recorded in Scripture? It is the commandment ‘love the trees.’ Whoever does not love trees, so he believed, does not love God.” “When you plant a tree,” he insisted, “you plant hope, you plant peace, you plant love, and you will receive God's blessing.”

An ecologist long before ecology had become fashionable, when hearing confessions of the local farmers he used to assign to them a penance, the task of planting a tree. During the long summer drought, he himself went round the island watering the young trees. His example and influence transformed Patmos: Photographs of the hillside near the Cave of the Apocalypse, taken at the start of the twentieth century, show bare and barren slopes, where today there is a thick and flourishing wood.

Fr. Amphilochios was by no means the first spiritual teacher to recognize the importance of trees. Two centuries earlier, St. Kosmas the Aetolian, martyred in 1779, used to plant trees as he traveled around Greece on his missionary journeys. In one of his “prophecies” he stated, “People will remain poor, because they have no love for trees.” We can see that prophecy fulfilled today in too many parts of the world.

“Love the trees.” Why should we do so? Is there indeed a connection between love of trees and love of God? How far is it true that a failure to reverence and honor our natural environment -- animals, trees, earth, fire, air, and water – is also, in an immediate and soul-destroying way, a failure to reverence and honor the living God?

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

Q

Can you examine the effects of sin on people and the environment?

What is necessary to heal this condition?

How does the command of the angel in Rev. 7:3 relate to this command?

Reflection

Humans Need to Regain Their Christian Identity

We have received with joy your kind invitation to participate in the International Conference on Orthodox Spirituality with the theme “Man, Custodian of Creation.” This theme suggests a revival of contemporary thought about the meaning of life in the new conditions of modern civilization, on which depends our future, especially the efforts of the mission of the Church and of our common Christian witness in the modern world.

We, as Christians taught by Holy Tradition and the experience of the holy Church Fathers, always link this theme with the need for repentance because when man fell, due to his sin, he lost his identity. Because of his tendency toward transgression, man became weak and cannot find strength in himself to return 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.

The human becomes a custodian of creation because it is created by the will of God for only one reason - to become one in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15). The human person is called to protect the work of God's hands because the deeds of God protect and nurture him. The creation needs God for its very existence 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 witnessing the divisions in Christian truth before the modern world which is yearning for spiritual direction and meaning in the mystery of life. We are firmly convinced that the theme for your Conference is for the benefit and joy of all Christians. With these sentiments We greet you cordially, conveying to you and your monastic brotherhood and all the participants of the conference, our prayerful wishes for the grace of God and success in the forthcoming days.

His Beatitude Patriarch Irinej, Metropolitan of Belgrade and All-Serbia,
Serbian Orthodox Church, Letter to Abbot Enzo, August 31, 2012

Q

How is the fall related to environmental destruction?

Why are human beings the protector of God's works?

How can man reclaim his lost identity?

Reflection

Environmental Pollution is Sin

We invite Orthodox Christians to engage in repentance for the way in which we have behaved toward God, each other, and the world.

If human beings treated one another's personal property the way they treat their environment, we would view that behavior as anti-social. We would impose the necessary judicial measures to restore wrongly appropriated personal possessions. It is therefore appropriate, for us to seek ethical, legal recourse where possible, in matters of ecological crimes.

It follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; For humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands; For humans to injure other humans with disease for humans to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances. These are sins.

In prayer, we ask for forgiveness of sins committed both willingly and unwillingly. Thus we begin the process of healing our worldly environment.

We are urging a different and more satisfactory ecological ethic. How we treat the earth and all of creation defines the relationship that each of us has with God. We must be spokespeople for an ecological ethic that reminds the world that it is not ours to use for our own convenience. It is God's gift of love to us and we must return his love by protecting it and all that is in it.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Symposium on the Environment,
Santa Barbara, California, November 8, 1997

Q

Why does our treatment of the earth define our relationship to God?

Why is pollution and defilement of the earth a sin?

How much must our lifestyle change if we are to rightly care for God's earth?

Reflection

Christians Must Become Sensitive to Ecological Issues

It is important that [Orthodox] Church members become increasingly sensitive about environmental issues.... That will be challenging for the people of the Church, but I think that we have already begun the process. We have identified one problem as being indifference towards God's creation.

One of our tasks is to help the people who come to church become more aware that a passive attitude or indifference towards ecological issues is wrong, and that they should become more appreciative of the integrity of creation, in other words the integrity of God's work.

Although it is not reasonable to expect results immediately, at least we have made a start. Fortunately in the Church we live in hope, and therefore we have the hope that we shall be more effective in the future.

HB Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, Symposium on The Book of Revelation, Reflections, September 27, 1995

Q

Why is sensitivity to ecological issues important?

What is insensitivity to ecological issues? Why might this condition arise?

How does a person overcome this sort of insensitivity?

Reflection

Priestly Asceticism is for All Christians

The ecological problem, at root, is a spiritual issue. Many people dealing with the environment tend to overlook its spiritual aspects. Yet both historically and practically it is impossible to address it without reference to religion and ethics. What motivation can religion offer people facing the ecological crisis? Here are some suggestions:

Stressing and promoting the idea of the sacredness of creation in all its aspects, spiritual as well as material...

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... 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 centre.

An "ecological asceticism," if we may coin such a term, begins with deep respect for the material creation, including the human body, and builds upon the view that we are not masters and possessors of creation, but we are called to turn the creation into a vehicle of communion.... This last point is of paramount importance. Human beings must realize that natural resources are not unlimited. Creation is finite and so are the resources that nature provides for our needs. The consumerist philosophy of life ignores this truth.

Reconsider our concept of quality of life. Quality does not need quantity to exist. A restriction in our use of natural resources can lead to a happier life than the endless competition of spending and acquiring more and more. Qualitative growth must replace the concept of economic development which is dominated by quantitative statistics. Asceticism must cease to be a notion referring to a class of religious eccentrics and become synonymous with qualitative - instead of quantitative - progress in human societies.

HE Metropolitan John of Pergamon, "Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution,"
April, 1996

Q

What does it mean that God's creation is sacred in terms of human behavior?

How would you define ecological asceticism?

What does it mean to be a priest of creation?

Reflection

The Living Symbolism of Creation

The man who takes communion should become a man who sanctifies. The mystical way in Orthodoxy requires as a necessary stage the contemplation of nature, a vision of “the secrets of the glory of God hidden in things,” to quote a great mystic who was both an Arab and a Christian, Saint Isaac the Syrian.

Another Christian Arab, Maximos the Confessor, interprets this contemplation as an extension of the eucharist. “Living things,” he said, “reveal themselves as the body of the Lord, and their celestial roots as his ‘blood.’” Man can make his own the interiority of things; he can share in their praise; he can hear it in them; he can make it conscious and vocal in himself. Again, Maximos says, “It is important to gather the spiritual truths, the *logoi* of all things, and to present them to God as offerings on behalf of creation.”

Yes, for us as monks, as it was for the Fathers of the Church, the world, and I am quoting St Ephrem the Syrian, “is an ocean of symbols.” St Maximos wrote, “Here he is, the Invisible in visible things, the Impalpable in palpable things. Thus does He gather us into Himself from all things.”

If we think that nature is sufficient, that it can be reduced to blind processes in a world which is immense and closed, then nature has no meaning and death has the last word.... But *ecclesial* man, the man-in-Christ, who is consciously an image of God, discovers meaning everywhere. Nothing is closed to him and the world is translucent.

To this symbolic structure of the world there corresponds a symbolic knowledge; one which detects “verticality” in things, which detects the glory of God, a glory which by definition cannot be grasped, but nonetheless reveals itself to our understanding when we are seized by it. Think of the importance of the notion of “wonder” in the Bible. The symbol gives rise to a form of awareness which is resplendent with its own self-evidence and which cannot be separated from a feeling of tenderness at the beauty and gentleness of God.

HB Patriarch IGNATIUS IV of Antioch, “A Spirituality of Creation,”
Lausanne, Switzerland, March 11, 1989

Q

What is the role of symbols in the Church?

How does one detect a symbolic “verticality” in all things?

What is a symbolic knowledge?

Reflections

What Values Guide Our Energy Choices?

We call on all Americans, and particularly our own leaders and congregants, to consider carefully these values, which should guide our individual energy choices and by which we should judge energy policy options. In securing human well-being by preserving creation and promoting justice, conservation is a personal and a public virtue – a comprehensive moral value – a standard for everything we do to assure energy for a wholesome way of life.

We pray that the wisdom, faith, and solidarity of the American people will bring us together – at this critical juncture – to redirect our national energy policy toward conservation, efficiency, justice, and maximum use of the perennial abundance of clean and renewable energy that our Creator brought into being by proclaiming, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3).

“At stake are: the future of God’s creation on earth; the nature and durability of our economy; our public health and public lands; the environment and quality of life we bequeath our children and grandchildren. We are being called to consider national purpose, not just policy.”

His Eminence Archbishop Demitrios, GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA;
 HE Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), Archdiocese of North America, ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX Church;
 HE Metropolitan Christopher, President, Episcopal Council (SCOBA);
 SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE USA AND CANADA;
 HE Archbishop Mar Cyril Aphrem Karim, Patriarchal vicar for the eastern U.S., SYRIAN ORTHODOX
 (Malankara) CHURCH OF ANTIOCH;
 HB Metropolitan Theodosius, THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA;
 Joint statement: “Moral Reflection on Energy Policy and Global Warming,”
 February, 2002

Q

Why do our energy choices shape the future of God’s creation?

How might you respond to this call from the bishops on right energy use?

How might the world change if we applied Christian principles to daily life?

Reflection

Discerning Beauty in Nature and Every Person

According to the sixth century theologian Dionysius the Areopagite, the most fundamental name of God is 'good.' This essential good, by the fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things. For Dionysius, what exists is good, and what is good is beautiful.

Dionysius gives us a picture of the universe in which God is the source of all that is. For Dionysius, perceptible beauty is a dim reflection of the unutterable Beauty of the Creator. It lifts our minds and hearts to its source.... The inanimate world and the world of plants and animals conforms to models that express the will of God, divine paradigms we are unable to perceive directly, but whose mediated presence, we can intuitively perceive.

Mankind alone does not conform to the divine paradigm... and therefore does not conform to the image of God within. That image is not confined to his conscience, or his reason.... It is found in the whole of his being. Each individual human being is a hologram of the universe: everything that is 'out there' is also 'in here.' Each of us is a microcosm of the whole. That is why we can experience plants and animals as our sisters and brothers, because their existence is implicit in the deeper levels of our being.

Thus our ecological task is to find ourselves in the universe, and find the universe in us. Our understanding will never reach the depths that are within us. However, we do not have to know everything before we begin to act. The truth of our actions will depend on our conforming to the deep structure of our own nature, and thereby bring our mode of behavior, into conformity with the will of God, which is known to us in part, through the world. All religious traditions have ways of helping their members to do this, and we must use the resources of our traditions for a common goal, a common good.

HG Bishop Basil of Sergievo, Russian Orthodox Church,
Symposium on the Black Sea, September 26, 1997

Q

What is beauty?

How may beauty become a teacher of personal behavior?

What does it mean that each person is a hologram of the universe?

Reflections

Our Prayer for the Restoration of the Earth

The world ... is offered to us as a gift by our Creator as an arena of social activity but also of spiritual sanctification in order that we might inherit the creation [which is] to be renewed in the future age. Such has always been the theological position of the Holy Church of Christ, which is why we have pioneered an ecological effort... for the protection of our planet....

Of course, biodiversity is the work of divine wisdom and was not granted to humanity for its unruly control. By the same token, dominion over the earth implies rational use and enjoyment of its benefits, not destructive acquisition of its resources out of greed. Nevertheless, in our times, we observe an excessive abuse of natural resources, resulting in the destruction of the environmental balance of the planet's ecosystems and generally of ecological conditions, so that the divinely-ordained regulations upon human existence are increasingly transgressed. For instance, all of us – scientists as well as religious and political leaders – are witnessing a rise in the atmosphere's temperature, extreme weather conditions, the pollution of ecosystems on land and sea, and an overall disturbance – sometimes to the point of utter destruction – of the potential for life in some regions of the world.

We are obliged to admit that the causes of these ecological changes are not inspired by God but initiated by humans. Thus, the invocation and supplication of the Church and us all to God... for the restoration of creation are essentially a petition of repentance for our sinfulness in destroying the world instead of working to preserve and sustain its ever-flourishing resources reasonably and carefully.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,
September 1, 2012

Q

What is our duty to God regarding care of the environment?

What must we do to avoid despoiling the earth?

What happens when we fail at this responsibility?

Reflections

Intensify Cooperation to Protect God's Creation

The Orthodox Church appreciates these efforts to overcome the ecological crisis and calls people to intensive co-operation in actions aimed to protect God's creation. At the same time, she notes that these efforts will be more fruitful if the basis on which man's relations with nature are built will be not purely humanistic, but also Christian.

One of the main principles of the Church's stand on ecological issues is the unity and integrity of the world created by God. Orthodoxy does not view nature as an isolated and self-enclosed structure. The plant, animal and human worlds are interconnected.

In the Christian view, nature is not a repository of resources intended for egotistical and irresponsible consumption. Rather, it is a house in which man is not the master, but a housekeeper. It is a temple in which he is the priest serving not nature, but the one Creator. The conception of nature as a temple is based on the principle of theocentrism: God Who gives to all "life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25) is the Source of being. Therefore, life itself in its various manifestations is sacred, being a gift of God. Any encroachment on it is a challenge not only to God's creation, but also to the Lord Himself.

HB Patriarch Kyrill, Archbishop of Moscow and All-Russia,
Statement of the Russian Orthodox Church on Ecological programs, #4,
June 1, 2012

Q

What are the Orthodox theological foundations for action to heal God's earth?

How might a person help protect the earth? List the different ways.

What is the practical meaning of each person as a priest of creation?

Reflection

Each Person Stands Between Two Realities

Man is a mediator. He is poised between two realities – God and the world. He shares in both, he is united to both. He cannot live apart from either. That is the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The only humanity that can survive is the new humanity, the humanity that has now been inseparably, indivisibly united with God in Jesus Christ.

The new humanity is a mediating humanity – a humanity that reconciles and unites God and the world. It is an incarnate humanity – a humanity that is an inseparable part of the whole creation and inseparably united to the Creator.

This is the meaning of the human presence in the cosmos. To be with the one who unites. To be in Christ, uniting the divine and the human, the Creator and the creation, the transcendent and the immanent, the spiritual and the scientific-technological. To enter the mystery of “Christ in us,” yes, in us Christians, but also in us human beings, and in us as an integral part of the whole creation.

The subtle art of image making for the future needs skilled craftsmen as well as the gift of the Spirit. The various crises of our time should be used neither as occasions for doom-saying pessimism nor as a chance to peddle empty-hope optimism. Every crisis is a judgement, a call to see where things have gone wrong and to seek to set matters right, both within our consciousness and in society.

The environmental crisis, the economic crisis, the crisis of justice, the crisis of faith..., the crisis of militarism – of all of these are symptoms not only that humanity has yet to become what it has to be, but also that it is on the wrong track.

HE Metropolitan Mar Paulos Gregorios,
Syrian (Malankara) Orthodox Church of India,
New Delhi, India, 1987

Q

What does it mean that humans are mediators?

How is a mediating humanity akin to humans as priests of creation?

Why are crises messages to society?

Reflections

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 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 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 Continuing Work of the Church

I pray from my heart for all the workers and missionaries of the love of Christ, the Metropolitans and Bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Priests through out Africa and our blessed children, Greeks, Arabs, Africans, Serbs, Russians and Romanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians and other nationalities, that the Grace of the Most Holy God will strengthen your lives always.

Now that the new period of Missionary and Catechetical work is about to start, we are all geared towards sowing and harvesting of the Word of God in the hearts of the people. The evangelization of the nations, the teaching of the people of God regarding the important issues of faith and Christian life, the great problems of the world and society, joblessness, narcotics, diseases, wars, the ecological problem, destruction and pollution of the environment and many others, create in us all a huge problem and an internal need for prayer, strong prayer, so that solutions can be found for all levels.

Having our faith in Christ as a rule, the joy and optimism which stem from this perspective, we will continue with the “good fight,” we will remain in the battlements and we will all be humble Missionaries of the good and the beautiful, that which our Orthodox Church teaches us, applying the exhortations of St Paul, which is beneficial for us all.

I send to you all the heartfelt Patriarchal blessing of the Apostle Mark and my Paternal prayer, that the Almighty God “who holds the times and the seasons in His own authority,” may protect and bless the whole world, the blessed and suffering land of Africa, the continent of the future, the crossroads of civilizations, granting health and happiness to all.

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa,
Alexandria, Egypt, September 1, 2009

Q

How do you understand the work of the Church?

How might you participate in this great work?

Do you know what the exhortations of Saint Paul involve?

Reflection

The Ecological Crisis as a Moral Crisis

The ecological crisis demonstrates that we cannot have two ways of looking at the world: religious on the one hand and worldly on the other. We cannot separate our concern for human dignity, human rights or social justice from concern for ecological preservation and sustainability....

If we value each individual, made in the image of God, and if we value every particle of God's creation, then we will care for each other and our world. In religious terms, the way we relate to nature directly reflects the way we relate to God and to our fellow human beings, as well as the way we relate to the biodiversity of creation.

At stake is not just respect for biodiversity, but our very survival. Scientists calculate that those most harmed by global warming will be the most vulnerable. It is those living in the typhoon-prone Philippines who are being forced not only to deal with the miseries of flooded homes and prolonged disruption, but to make fundamental changes in their way of life. And there is a bitter injustice about the fact that those suffering the worst ravages have done the least to contribute to it. The ecological crisis is directly related to the ethical challenge of eliminating poverty and advocating human rights.

This means that global warming is a moral crisis and a moral challenge. The dignity and rights of human beings are intimately and integrally related to the poetry and – we would dare to say – the rights of the earth itself.

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

Q

How can there be unity between our spiritual and material views of the world?

How is it that the way we relate to nature reflects on the way we relate to God?

Why is global climate change a critical moral problem?

Reflection

An Orthodox Ecological Ethic

The Orthodox ecological ethic goes beyond responsible stewardship. “Stewardship” is an ethical concept that is accessible to all, even to those outside the Church. Its themes of responsibility, balance, and prudence are amenable to common sense.... The best of the secular ecologists reflect the ideal of stewardship in their statements.

The ideal of stewardship is not enough. The Orthodox ecological ethic is also ecclesial – and it is this dimension of our ethic that is especially needed today. What is ecclesial in the Orthodox ecological ethic is the revelation that man is a source of blessing for the natural world. Mankind has a priestly role, a eucharistic vocation, in mediating God’s grace to Creation.

This emphasis is reflected time and again in Orthodox ecclesial life. The *euchologion* frequently calls for man’s interaction with the things of Creation in the Holy Mysteries. Palms and willow branches are blessed on Palm Sunday. Flowers and herbs are blessed on Transfiguration. Basil and flowers are blessed at Holy Cross. There are prayers of blessing for new fields, beehives and orchards and gardens to yield great bounty and harvest. Through all this blessing, there is the constant theme of man gathering God’s creatures, and bringing them into higher participation in Grace.

Man is the only creature in Creation that is a *person*, both body and soul. Thus, man has the task of harmonizing and uniting the world of the soul with the world of the body and matter. This is the task of blessing. It is a task that is comprised of the right use of the world. But it is a task that calls for man to be transformed.... The Orthodox ecological ethic calls for nothing less than for the ecologist to pursue the spiritual life.

HE Metropolitan Nicholas of Amisso, Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church,
“Man as Curse or Blessing,” Antiochian Village, June 15, 2002

Q

What does Orthodox ecclesial life involve?

Why is it that stewardship of creation is not enough?

How would you define an Orthodox understanding of the right use of the world?

Reflections

The Core of the Orthodox Ecological Ethic

The person who enters a life of repentance, seeking spiritual purification, will win freedom from the passions that inflame consumerism and other forms of environmental exploitation. The one who continues in the spiritual life, who seeks illumination, will discern in each creature its *logos*. He will discern the meaning and purpose that creature has received from God...

Finally, the one who seeks first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness will acquire the Holy Spirit. He will become a conduit for the presence of grace and God's Uncreated Energies. The unifying and restorative energies of God Himself will flow through his life, and will accomplish much salvation for the created world. Have we not seen this in the life of St. Sergius of Radonezh? Or in the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov?

The Saint is the image of the Orthodox ecological ethic. The environment needs now, more than ever, such a source of Divine Grace. *"Creation awaits with eager longing for the sons of God,"* St. Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans (8:19). Creation waits for man to take his rightful role in the natural scheme. For too long, man has been a "curse" to Creation. It began with Adam and Eve's destructive declaration of autonomy at The Fall, and the curse continued through aeons of warfare, pollution and unbridled waste.

The Orthodox ecological ethic testifies that the long legacy of the ecological curse can be stopped by the moral freedom of each person. It can be stopped, and things can be put right again, when a Christian thanks God for every gift, and prays so that its use may be true to grace. In this way, and this way only, man can be a blessing, and not a curse.

HE Metropolitan Nicholas of Amissos, Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church,
"Man as Curse or Blessing," Antiochian Village, June 15, 2002

Q

Why are the saints models of the Orthodox ecological ethic?

What happens when we bless God's creation?

How may we stop the ancient curse and restore grace?

Reflection

The Path of the Saints

The Saints have always taught that no one is saved alone and, therefore, that no one should strive for individual salvation, but for the salvation of the whole world. Such a teaching is affirmed in the environmental field and confirmed by science. This conviction constitutes an essential aspect of the environmental ethos, required both of believers who rely on the precepts of faith and of those who wish to establish an ethos based on reason.

This concern for the salvation of all humanity and the preservation of all creation is translated into a merciful heart and sensitive attitude, so characteristically described by the seventh-century ascetic, Abba Isaac the Syrian. We are responsible not only for our actions, but also for the consequences of our interventions. After all, no responsible ruler leaves the growth of one's people unplanned and to the mercy of fate. Rather, a wise ruler assumes appropriate measures for the people's growth in accordance with specific goals.

As ruler of creation, humanity is obliged to plan for its preservation and development. This requires the recruitment of scientific knowledge and involves the respect of all life, especially of the primacy of human life. It is precisely such a vision that also constitutes the fundamental criterion for any environmental ethos.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,
Symposium on the Adriatic, June 6, 2002

Q

Why is it that we are not saved alone, but collectively?

What is our Christian vision of creation and how does this relate to salvation?

How does saving the creation relate to saving our own souls?

Reflection

Asceticism and Self-Sufficiency

Orthodox Christians have learned from the Church Fathers to restrict and reduce our needs as far as possible. In response to the ethos of consumerism we propose the ethos of asceticism, namely an ethos of self-sufficiency to what is needed.

This does not mean deprivation, but rational and restrained consumption as well as the moral condemnation of waste. “So if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6.8), as the Lord’s Apostle urges us. And after the multiplication of the five loaves and the satisfaction of five thousand people, excluding women and children, Christ Himself ordered His disciples to collect the remainder “so that nothing would be lost” (John 6.12).

Unfortunately, contemporary societies have abandoned the application of this commandment, surrendering to wastefulness and irrational abuse to satisfy vain desires of prosperity. However, such conduct can be transformed for the sake of creating resources and energy by more appropriate means.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Letter on the Annual Day of Prayers for Creation, September 1, 2015

Q

What is an ethos of asceticism?

How is it applied?

How does a person make the break from consumerism into asceticism?

Reflections

The Orthodox Christian Ecological Ethic

The Orthodox Christian ecological ethic protests against the consumerist ethic. The truth of “dominion” in the Holy Tradition is clear: man was given primacy in Creation; but he was given primacy with the responsibility of *stewardship*.

A good steward uses the resources of his Master, but he does not merely “consume.” A good steward is careful to protect the things of his Master’s house: he protects against destruction and decay. He would never permit pollution, rainforest burning, extinction of entire species. He would be alarmed by global warming, ozone depletion, and the loss of wetlands.

We say this while believing firmly in the primacy of man in God’s creation. We cannot agree with radical environmentalists who oppose human dominion... some of them go so far as to oppose any human place within the environment....

It should be self-evident that such an ethic [as consumerism] is utterly foreign to Christian piety. Christians, by their very nature, should recoil from such a wanton manifestation of the passions of pride, avarice and gluttony. Unfortunately we have become so habituated to this ethic that we no longer recoil. We no longer find it foreign. Why is it that we are not insulted, as we should be, when we are called – everyday – “consumers”?

HE Metropolitan Nicholas of Amisso, Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church,
Antiochian Village, June 15, 2002

Q

What is a right Christian attitude toward the world?

Why is the consumerist attitude to the world wrong?

During our holidays how should we apply our Christian ethic?

Reflection

The Human Duty to Sanctify the World

God has not allowed humanity to be a mere spectator or an irresponsible consumer of the world and of all that is in the world. Indeed, humanity is called to assume the task of being primarily a partaker and a sharer in the responsibility for everything in the created world. Having been endowed from the beginning with “the image of God,” humanity is called to continual self-transcendence so that in responsible synergy with God the Creator, each person might sanctify the entire world, thus becoming a faithful “minister” and “steward.”

It is clear that the concepts of minister and steward exceed by far the contemporary accepted ideal of a person called “an ecologist,” not having any further qualifications.... Just by becoming God's minister and steward over all of creation, does not mean that man simply prospers or is happy in the world.... The main and lasting benefit of these qualifications is that by using the world in a pious manner, humanity experiences the blessed progression from the stage of “God's image” to that of “divine likeness,” in the same way that all the other good elements of the universe are transformed, by the grace of God and even without human intervention, from the stage of “potentiality” stage to that of “actuality” in fulfillment of the pre-eternal plan of the entire divine economy....

Addressing the faithful of the Church and every person of goodwill with these pious thoughts, we wish worthily and in a manner pleasing to God to invite and encourage every person, and above all the faithful, to constantly watch over his or her fellow human beings and the world, for the benefit of us all and for the glory of the Creator.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Message on the Day of
Prayers for Creation, September 1, 1992

Q

What is human purpose in relation to creation?

How does being in the image of God relate to the sanctification of the world?

How are we to watch over the world for the benefit of all?

Reflections

U.S. Bishops Statement on Climate Change (part one)

As Church leaders, it is our responsibility to speak to this condition [of global climate change] as it represents a grave moral and spiritual problem.

We wish to emphasize the seriousness and urgency of the situation.

To persist in a path of excess and waste, at the expense of our neighbors and beyond the capability of the planet to support the lifestyle responsible for these changes, is not only folly; it jeopardizes the survival of God's creation... In the end, not only is it sinful; it is no less than suicidal.

But there is hope. Society can alter its behavior and avoid the more serious consequences of climate change. To do this, we must work together to reduce the way that we have exploited the earth's resources, especially fossil fuels. As Americans, we comprise barely 4% of the world's people, yet consume over 25% of its resources and energy. Justice and charity for our neighbors demand a more frugal, simple way of living in order to conserve the fruits of creation.

In order to make the required changes, we are called to pray for a change in our personal attitudes and habits, in spite of any accompanying inconvenience. Such is the depth of *metanoia* or repentance. The issue is not merely our response to climate change, but our failure to obey God. We must live in a manner that is consistent with what we believe and how we pray.... At minimum, this means caring about the effect of our lives upon our neighbors, respecting the natural environment, and demonstrating a willingness to live within the means of our planet. Such a change will require reduction in our consumption of fossil fuels as well as acceptance of alternative energy sources such as solar or wind power, and other methods that minimize our impact upon the world. We can do these things, but it will require intentional effort from each of us. ...

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;
 HE Archbishop Mar Cyril Aphrem Karim, Patriarchal vicar for eastern U.S., Syrian Orthodox Church;
 HB Metropolitan Theodosius, The Orthodox Church in America (OCA);
 Declaration on "Global Climate Change: A Moral and Spiritual Challenge," adopted unanimously by the
 Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), May 23, 2007.

Q

Why is climate change a serious issue?

How can it be addressed?

What can and should you do?

Reflection

U.S. Bishops Statement on Climate Change (Con't - part two)

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

How many commands can you count in this two page statement from our bishops?

What will it take to apply all of these directives?

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

Reflection

Program Announcements

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration is offering a series of tools and programs to help you and your parish develop awareness of creation care. See a few of our materials in the list below.

The Face of God film

A film on Orthodox theology and its mandate on climate change will soon be released. This can bring new members to your parish. If you would like to show this film in your parish or in the surrounding community, please send a note to our office. Send your request to: Fred@Ecostewards.org

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

These monthly readings are available by e-mail at no charge. For a printed copy sent via U.S. Mail, please send a donation to cover printing and mailing costs.

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

<http://www.Orth-transfiguration.org>

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Publication Department
P.O. Box 7348
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

www.Orth-Transfiguration.org



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