



The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

A Daily Reading Program on the Christian Theology of Creation

The Vision and Spiritual Direction of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew along with Other Orthodox Patriarchs

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

Month Four
April 1 -30, 2020

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

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Introduction

During Great Lent, Christians are called to follow our Lord Jesus Christ onto the cross. This allows us to participate to some extent in His Resurrection at Pascha.

This year, wherever we live, Lent will be different because we are facing a world-wide epidemic of the corona virus. This means that the manner in which we experience the cross in our Lenten journey will have a unique set of dimensions.

Parishes and parishioners are already facing drastically new conditions with neighbors who may be fearful of infection and suffering from anxiety about illness or even a painful death. Food shortages are already emerging in some areas. How can we provide charity and help under these conditions? Church services are being interrupted and in many communities cancelled. How do we become more self-sufficient in our own prayers? This is a test that many of us are or will shortly be facing. As we pray for guidance, it will arrive in many forms and from different directions.

Already from across the Orthodox Church we are learning of novel ways to respond. From the Ukrainian Bishops in the USA we receive a prayer of healing that all of us may use. See https://ukrainianorthodoxchurchusa.com/news_200310_1.

From the far-off tiny Church of Georgia, we hear that His Holiness Patriarch Ilya has been given a vision on how to address this new coronavirus. He tells us to fear not! See his vision related at <https://Orthochristian.com/129044.html>

From the monks of Mount Athos we are invited to pray the Jesus Prayer every evening at 10:00 PM local time to restrain the impact of this worldwide epidemic.

From His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew we have a special letter of guidance and direction that applies to us all. (See April 2, below).

From parishes small and large we learn of shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry and guidance for those who may be sick, stressed or facing some other need.

What we don't yet have, but what these readings from Church hierarchs are steering us toward is a genuine Orthodox Christian way of life, i.e., a Christian culture. What appears to be guidance on ecologically conscious living should also be recognized as a gateway into a whole Orthodox way of life. These writings from patriarchs and bishops provide vision and direction on our Christian responsibility to shape a lifestyle that is harmoniously connected to God and neighbor and harmless living. Their guidance gives direction for how to live in the modern world and the new earth that is now emerging.

Yours in service to God's good earth,

EM - MR - EC - FK
editors

The Great Challenge of Our Generation

As Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has written: “Climate change affects everyone. Unless we take radical and immediate measures to reduce emissions stemming from unsustainable excesses in the demands of our lifestyle, the impact will be both immediate and alarming.”

Therefore, each parish and every individual should seek out ways of practicing prayer and care for God’s creation by applying the fundamental principles of scripture, theology and tradition with regard to our relationship with the natural environment by considering changes in our attitudes and habits with regard to food and travel, by reducing consumption of fossil fuels and choosing alternative sources of energy with regard to lighting and heating, as well as by raising and promoting awareness with regard to the divine gifts of water and air.

Every parish and community is invited and encouraged to open a fruitful dialogue on this challenge of our generation.

HE Archbishop Elpidophorus, Protocol No. 22/19, September 1, 2019

Q

What is global climate change?

How might members of a parish address climate change?

Why is this an important issue for Orthodox parishes?

Reflection

Message Regarding COVID-19

The voice of the Church cannot be silent in such times. Our words... take the form we have learned through the ages: through the liturgy and through instruction, with encouragement and consolation....

We entreat you to respond faithfully and patiently to all the difficult but necessary measures proposed by health authorities and nations. Everything is being done for our protection, for our common good, to contain the spread of this virus. Our liberation from this distress depends entirely on our cooperation.

Perhaps some have felt that these measures undermine or harm our faith. However, that which is at stake is not our faith – it is the faithful. It is not Christ – it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man – but human beings.

Our faith is a living faith, and there is no exceptional circumstance that can limit or suppress it. What must be limited and suppressed in these extraordinary circumstances are gatherings and large congregations of people. Let us remain in our homes. Let us be careful and protect those around us.

We see our neighbors suffering from the consequences of the virus, while others have already fallen and departed from among us. Our Church hopes and prays for the healing of the sick, for the souls of the departed, and for courage and strength to the families of the afflicted.

This trial, too, shall pass. The clouds will clear, and the Sun of Righteousness will eliminate the deadly effect of the virus. But our lives will have changed forever. This trial is an opportunity for us to change for the better. In the direction of establishing love and solidarity.

Beloved children in the Lord, may the blessing of the Lord, through... the All-Holy Mother of God, accompany us in our journey, transform our voluntary isolation into genuine communion, and become our prayer and destination to appreciate the meaning of this, so that we may return to that which is true [and] pleasing to God! Have courage! And may God be with us!

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, The Phanar, March 19, 2019

Q

How can this COVID-19 trial be an opportunity for us to change for the better?

How might the coronavirus epidemic change our lives?

What will it take for the changes we make now to endure into the future?

Reflection

Friday

April 3, 2020

Responses to the Coronavirus Epidemic

We are in a special situation while facing a great problem, which is not only our problem but the problem of the whole world – the appearance of the coronavirus.

I invite all our faithful to be disciplined and to accept everything that is proposed and to implement that in their life for their own interest. Life is the greatest gift of God that we must preserve. Let us be disciplined, let us listen to what expert people suggest....

HB Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, Belgrade, March 15, 2020

Be courageous, my brothers! Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos gives us hope! God created our planet with so much love and He will not abandon it. Be courageous and stay strong!

HB Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria and All-Africa, Metropolis of Memphis, at prayers for protection from the deadly coronavirus, March 21, 2020

It is time to seek refuge in the privacy of our homes, until the wrath of this plague is past.

HE Teofan, Archbishop of Iasi, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, Iasi, Romania, March 18, 2020

Turn every house into a small church and pray, asking for the immense grace and mercy of God on mankind. Abide by the self-protection measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Our Church is with you and by your side. She loves all of you and prays for you all. We act responsibly because we love, not because fear knocks at our door. We are looking forward, praying, to Easter. And then the whole Creation will shine in the light of Resurrection, joy, hope. Take courage, my brothers, The Lord is with you.

HE Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, March, 2020

After each liturgy, the faithful will not be allowed to kiss the cross [or] holy icons, which must be cleaned systematically with disinfectant solution.

With regard to Holy Communion, the Holy Mysteries of Christ should be offered and the spoon should be wiped after each partaker with a cloth impregnated with spirits (with regular refreshing the impregnation)....

The priests, the abbots and abbesses of the monasteries must adhere strictly to hygiene rules and disinfect their hands during the day at least once every two hours....

HB Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus, March 23, 2020

Another Type of Fasting

In an age of technology we should extend our fasting rules to include technology in order to gain spiritual peace during Lent.

At least during the beginning of Lent, us let try to be less dependent on cell phones, social networks, and email accounts, lest the anxiety, which they throw at us, get inside us.

Technology can be a blessing, but it also has a very subtle reverse dimension, because of the way it fragments our thinking to a large degree.

We become so dependent on technology that it becomes very difficult for us to break away. I think it is necessary, in the world in which we live, to embrace such a type of fasting, a media quarantine. Fasting is a sacrifice and I think it is a sacrifice to give up our phone.

It would be very beneficial to detach ourselves as much as possible from those things that do not bring us peace.

HG Bishop Ignatie of Huși, Sunday Sermon,
Romanian Orthodox Church, March 1, 2020

Q

Why do Orthodox Christians fast?

What benefits emerge from fasting?

How might a fast from technology become beneficial?

Reflection

Voluntary Restraint in the Use of Material Goods

We should consider every act through which we abuse the world as having an immediate negative effect upon the future of our environment in which our posterity will live. The way in which we face our environment reflects the way we behave toward one another. It reflects upon the way in which we relate to our children, those born and those who are yet to be born.

Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence. Humans are created as spiritual beings in which resides the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Our bodies are created from material nature, the dust of the earth. Interconnectedness between our nature and our environment lies at the center of our liturgy...

The asceticism of the Orthodox Church requires voluntary restraint regarding the use of material goods, leading to a harmonious symbiosis with the environment. We are required to practice restraint. When we curb our desire to consume, we guarantee the existence of treasured things for those who come after us and ensure the balanced functioning of the ecosystem. Restraint frees us from selfish demands so that we may offer what remains at the disposal of others. Avarice, which has its roots in the lack of faith and making of a god out of matter, we consider idolatry. Restraint is an act of self-control and confidence in God, but it is also an act of love. This willful asceticism is not only required of anchorite monks; it is required of all Orthodox Christians according to the measure of balance. Asceticism is not negation, but a reasonable and tempered utilization of the world.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,
New York City, NY, November 13, 2000

Q

How is our relationship to the environment related to our interaction with people?

In what ways does the liturgy connect our nature to our environment?

Why can asceticism be understood as an act of love?

Reflections

Facing a Global Climate Emergency

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

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

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

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

Q

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

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

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

Reflections

Unite to Combat Climate Change

World Environment Day, celebrated on 5th June every year, is the main method of the United Nations to make people aware of the worldwide environmental demolition and to attract the action of various political and human resources.

The day's agenda gives a human face to environmental issues. It empowers people to becoming active agents of sustainable and equitable development; to promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes toward environmental issue; and to advocate partnerships which ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

World environment day is a popular event with colourful activities such as street rallies, bicycle parades, concerts, essay and poster competition in schools, tree planting as well as recycling and cleaning up campaigns. The theme of this year's environment day is thought provoking "Your Planet Needs You – Unite to Combat Climate Change!"

We in Kerala are worried about the weak and sporadic rains in this season of normally heavy and incessant downpour. It is explicitly felt that the rhythm and balance in nature is disturbed. Although climate change can seem complex, there are a variety of simple actions that individuals and communities can take to make a difference. A few of the actions which we can employ are energy conservation, education programmes to create awareness, planting trees, using less petrol vehicles and recycling projects.

I exhort all Church members to observe the day with seriousness and learn to go back to the nature. A simple, natural and unsophisticated lifestyle is the best cure for these maladies. Let us join our hands to save our planet. Let us all unite to combat climate change and make this planet a commodious dwelling place for the posterity.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Paulose Mar Milithios,
The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, (aka The Indian Orthodox Church),
March 22, 2010

Q

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

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

What might you do in your community to address climate change?

Reflections

“Sub-Creators” in the Image of God

We human beings... are called to continue and to extend the mystery of Christ’s Transfiguration on the mountain. As Metropolitan John of Pergamon has affirmed, “the distinctive characteristic of the human is not so much that we are a logical animal, but rather that we are an animal that is creative.”

Endowed as we are with freedom and self-awareness, entrusted with the power of conscious choice – “sub-creators” formed in the image of God the Creator, living icons of the living God – we have the capacity not merely to manufacture or produce but to create, to set our personal seal upon the environment, to reveal new meanings within nature: in a word, to transfigure.

Through our creative powers, through science, technology, craftsmanship and art, we enlarge the radiance of the transfigured Christ, revealing in all material things the glory that is latent within them. That is precisely what we are seeking to achieve through all our ecological initiatives.

HE Metropolitan Kalistos of Diokleia, Symposium
on the Adriatic Sea, June 9, 2002

Q

What does His Eminence mean by the concept of “Sub-Creators”

How may we reveal the glory latent within material nature?

How are these concepts part of the Church’s ecological initiatives?

Reflection

Our Huge Responsibility to Save our Planet

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

Hence, the whole of creation, our planet and whatever exists on it, is God's wider habitation.... Man, as an inseparable part of this habitation of God, must be protected in every way.... The same applies to every part of creation. In this way we show special reverence to the Creator.

Under no circumstances may man create an opposition with his environment; that is, the wider space of nature in which he lives. We must not fall victims to the new times where unfortunately many people from inhuman arrogance and the unacceptable issues of colonization and the inconceivable lack of control over the industrial revolution and the unjust exploitation of man towards his fellow human beings, see nature as their adversary and enemy which they should besiege, pillage, conquer and rudely rape, changing her... into a huge cemetery....

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

Q

Can you summarize human responsibility to God for the care of the earth?

What are consequences of failure to observe these responsibilities?

How are the duties of a custodian different from those of an owner?

Reflection

Responsibility to Steward the World

The world around us has changed. This is a simple, but true statement and it relates to a fact that cannot be denied. Advancements in medicine, science, and technology have reshaped how we live, work and interact in our daily reality; and in so many ways these advancements have benefitted and enhanced our earthly existence. However, we must acknowledge that they come with a cost.

As we look around us, we notice that the economic engines that drive our country, as well as the world economy, are causing a greater number of people to live in large urban areas, rather than rural locations where they lived in the past. These large concentrations of humanity result in people living farther away from the sources of their food, greater consumption of natural resources, and the build up of pollution of our land, water and air. Moreover, with the world population now topping seven billion, one must wonder how many people our planet can really sustain.

When we read the first and second chapters of Genesis, we see that the description of the earth is truly beautiful. This gift alone is reason enough for us to what to preserve what God has given to us, not to mention that it is the earth that sustains our physical needs. Beyond this, however, it is clear that God not only intended for us to be users of the planet, but He also bestowed on us the responsibility to be its stewards.

HE Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, Open letter, August 2019

Q

How do the advancements in technology change our lives?

What is the difference between a user and a steward of the planet?

Is population an issue for Orthodox Christians? Why?

Reflection

Our Spiritual and Religious Duty

The human being is on earth, not as a stranger who came to receive a monetary profit, but as a careful owner who cultivates the earth for future generations and takes care, not only of his own profit, but also of the good of his neighbors and those far off.

Moreover, the care of protecting the Creation of God in all its beauty and harmony is not only our practical task but also a spiritual and religious duty, a fulfillment of the commandment of God and a trail of moral feeling.

The Black Sea region has suffered from many sad consequences of an unreasonable selfish use of nature and this has been especially dramatic in our century.

Today we must understand the need to work together for the transfiguration of this wonderful piece of land, for the improvement of the condition of the Black Sea, the pearl of our planet....

HB Patriarch +Alexey II, Primate, Russian Orthodox Church
Yalta, Russia, September 24, 1997

Q

What does it mean to live on earth and care for the good of future neighbors?

Why is protecting God's Creation our spiritual and religious duty?

How can we Orthodox work together in peace and harmony?

Reflection

Respect and Holy Regard for Animals

For members of the Orthodox Church an icon is not to be regarded in isolation, simply as a picture on a religious subject.... Much more significant is the fact that an icon exists within a specific context. It is part of an act of prayer and worship, and divorced from that context, it ceases to be authentically an icon. The art of the icon is par excellence a liturgical art.

If Orthodox icons depict not only humans, but animals, does this not imply that the animals have an accepted place in our liturgical celebration and our dialogue with God? We do not forget that, when Jesus withdrew to pray for forty days in the wilderness, he had the animals as his companions: “He was with the wild beasts” (Mark 1:13).

What the icon shows us – that the animals share in our prayer and worship – is confirmed by the prayer books used in the Orthodox Church. It is true that, when we look at the main act of worship, the Service of the Eucharist, we are at first disappointed; for in its two chief forms – the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom and that of St Basil the Great – there are no direct references to the animal creation. Yet, when we pray “for the peace of the whole world,” this surely includes animals. As one commentator puts it, “We pray for the peace of the universe, not only for mankind, but for every creature, for animals and plants, for the stars and all of nature.”

HE Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), Archdiocese of Thyateira
and Great Britain, Iasi, Romania, January, 2019

Q

What does Orthodox theology tell us about respect for animals?

How are Christians supposed to view icons?

What do icons teach us about how to view the world?

Reflection

Living Simply

Dear friends,

If we do not live more simply, we cannot learn to share. And if we do not learn to share, then how can we expect to survive? This may be a fundamental religious and spiritual value. Yet it is also a fundamental ethical and existential principle.

Each of us is called to draw a distinction between what we want and what we need, or – more importantly – what the world needs. Greed and gratification reduce the world to a survival of the fittest; whereas generosity and gratitude transform the world into a community of sharing.

We are invited to pursue a way of sacrifice – not a sacrifice that is cheap, but a sacrifice that is costly. As King David once said: “I will not offer to the Lord my God a sacrifice that costs me nothing” (Second Samuel 24.24). We must be prepared to make sacrifices – material and financial – that are genuine and even painful. And in this regard, whether we like it or not, more is demanded from the rich than from the poor.

HAH, Halki Theological School, June 18, 2012

Q

How are sharing and survival connected?

Why is sacrifice a virtue?

How can sharing transform the world?

Reflection

The Long Journey from the Head to the Heart

Sacrifice is primarily a spiritual issue and less an economic one. Similarly, in speaking of the environmental crisis, we are referring to an issue that is not technological or political, but ethical. The real crisis lies not in the environment but in the human heart. The fundamental problem is to be found, not outside, but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem, but in the way we think. Without a revolutionary change within ourselves, all our conservation projects will ultimately remain insufficient and ineffective.

We know what needs to be done and we know how it must be done. Yet, despite the information at our disposal, unfortunately very little is done.

It is a long journey from the head to the heart; and it is an even longer journey from the heart to the hands. We ... will explore ways and means to bridge the unacceptable gap between theory and practice, between ideas and life.

HAH, Halki, Turkey, June 12, 2012

Q

How is the real crisis of the environment primarily in the human heart?

What do the words “revolutionary change within ourselves” mean to you?

How do we in daily activity change the attitudes of our hearts and mind?

Reflection

The Transforming Blessing of the Holy Spirit

Without the Holy Spirit:

God is far away,
Christ stays in the past,
The Gospel is a dead letter,
The Church is simply an organization,
Authority a matter of domination,
Mission a matter of propaganda,
Liturgy is no more than an evocation,
Christian living a slave morality.

But with the Holy Spirit:

The cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the Kingdom,
The risen Christ is there,
The Gospel is the power of life,
The Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
Authority is a liberating service,
Mission is a Pentecost,
The liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,
Human action is deified.

HB Patriarch Ignatius IV (Hazim), Statement to the Fourth Assembly of the
World Council of Churches, Antiochian Orthodox Church, July 20, 1968

Q

Why is the health and life of the Church dependent upon the Holy Spirit?

What is necessary for the Holy Spirit to enliven your own life?

How is our Lord Jesus Christ connected to the Holy Spirit?

Reflection

The Order of All Things is Troubled

The order of all things is troubled. Nature's forces are explored and exploited in ways unsuitable to the harmony of the natural order. Nature is assaulted by human egocentric will. The uniqueness and sanctity of the human person is directly threatened. And all of humanity, coerced by the uncontrolled powers of haughty reason and the incurable weaknesses of moral and spiritual conduct, is moving along the precipitous edge of a yawning abyss.

In view of such changes and developments toward the unforeseeable future, it is necessary to seek out the prophetic charisma of the Church through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter of our life and of the entire world. Moreover, this, not in order for us to disclose whatever human beings may be planning, or to forecast their consequences or to make known what only God has established by His own authority (Acts 1.7).

Christian young people do not limit themselves to the claim of respect for human rights. They also advocate another aspect of what is right, namely, human responsibility and duty, for without the latter the former proves equally inhuman, as much as its violation does. They advocate, as well, the notion of justice as mercy and the restoration of all things to a condition of harmony, that is to say, the transcending of transactional justice with a justice that combines collectively all virtues.

HAH, The Millennial Youth Conference,
Istanbul, Turkey, June 18, 2000

Q

How are the forces of nature being exploited?

Why is it necessary to seek out the prophetic charisma of the Church?

What is the role of Christian youth in the notion of "justice as mercy"?

Reflection

Christ Brings Healing to the World

The Resurrection of Christ grants to faithful Christians the certainty – and to all humanity the possibility – of transcending the adverse consequences of natural calamity and spiritual perversity.

Nature rebels when the arrogant human mind endeavors to tame its boundless forces endowed by the Creator to its seemingly insignificant and inactive elements. In considering from a spiritual perspective the grievous natural phenomena that plague our planet repeatedly and successively in recent times, we acknowledge that these are inseparable from the spiritual and ethical deviation of humanity. The signs of this deviation – such as greed, avarice, and an insatiable desire for material wealth, alongside an indifference toward the poverty endured by so many as a result of the imbalanced affluence of the few – may not be clearly related to the natural occurrences in the eyes of scientists. Yet, for someone examining the matter spiritually, sin disturbs the harmony of spiritual and natural relations alike. For, there is a mystical connection between moral and natural evil; if we wish to be liberated from the latter, we must reject the former.

Our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the new Adam and God, constitutes the model for the beneficial influence of a saint on the natural world. For Christ healed physical and spiritual illness, granting comfort and healing to all people, while at the same time bringing calm and peace to stormy seas, multiplying five loaves of bread to feed the five thousand, thereby combining the reconciliation of spiritual and natural harmony.

If we want to exert a positive impact on the current negative natural and political conditions of our world, then we have no other alternative than faith in the Risen Christ and fulfillment of his saving commandments.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Pascha Letter, 2011

Q

How may humans enter into and participate in the transfiguration of the earth?

How is the earth defiled by human action?

How do we understand Jesus Christ as a model for our own lives?

Reflection

Reading the 'Signs of the Times'

In many parts of the world, indigenous cultures have been undermined by seductive images from the supposedly civilized world, propagating the idea that happiness is only to be found in consuming more and more material products.

For better or worse, we are living in an age when the destinies of all human beings and all human communities are ever more closely intertwined. Patterns of behavior and consumption in one corner of the globe can affect the lives and livelihood of people who live at the other extremity of the earth.

This new proximity, this closeness, need not be a bad thing if we learn to read the "signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3). To some degree, we are all drawn closer by a common experience of fear and suffering as the consequences of climate change are felt in different ways. At a time when climatic emergencies of many different kinds are affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of people, we have no moral choice but to "bear one another's burdens" as the New Testament (Galatians 6:2) enjoins us.

HAH, Ilulissat, Greenland, September 7, 2002

Q

How have indigenous cultures been undermined by the modern world?

How is all human destiny intertwined in the current age?

What are the signs of our times?

Reflection

The Starting-Point for an Environmental Ethic

The Orthodox Church assumes as its starting point for an environmental ethos the teaching of the Bible.... Let us concentrate on the biblical account of the relationship between humanity and the creation. The first noteworthy point is the restriction placed on the first-created not to consume a certain fruit.

Beyond serving as a basis for Christian asceticism, this commandment indicates environmental significance as the authority granted to humanity over nature is not absolute. While humanity was created to rule over earth, its rules are subject to restrictions ordained by the Creator. Trespassing against these rules results in fatal consequences. Today we witness death approaching because of trespassing against limits that God has placed on our proper use of creation.

A second point is that the gift of paradise to the first-created was accompanied by the commandment and responsibility of humanity “to work it and preserve it.” Working and preserving constitute an active responsibility. Therefore, any passivity or indifference toward environmental concerns cannot be regarded as proper.

A third point is that the consequences of the transgression of the first-created [the Fall] had cosmic implications, producing thorns and thistles in the environment. This rebellion incurred the corruption and destruction of the ecological balance, which continues to this day, whenever we violate the commandment of preservation and abstinence, proceeding instead to misuse and abuse of the earth.

Finally, we should observe that the Creator took special care during the great Flood, so that through Noah, the plants, the clean animals useful to humanity as well as the unclean ones that appeared of no consequence, should be preserved from extinction. This divine concern constitutes a vindication of our interest in the survival of those species that are vulnerable to extinction.

HAH, Symposium of the Adriatic, June 6, 2002

Q

What is the purpose of an environmental ethic?

How would you describe each of the biblical principles that HAH lists?

Can you name other biblical principles not listed in this collection?

Reflection

Developing a Spiritual Worldview

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 that 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?

It is not too late to respond. We can still steer the earth toward a suitable future for our children. But we can no longer afford to wait. Together with our political leaders we must act with urgency. Deadlines can no longer be postponed; indecision and inaction are not options. We have choices to make. The time to make a commitment to heal the earth is now.

HE Archbishop Seraphim of Zimbabwe, On Global Disruption, June, 2014

Q

What is a spiritual worldview?

Why is it essential to develop a spiritual worldview?

How are frugality, simplicity, humility, and respect involved?

Reflection

Promoting the Path of Sacrifice

Dear friends, If we do not live more simply, we cannot learn to share. And if we do not learn to share, how can we expect to survive? This may be a fundamental religious and spiritual value. Yet it is also a fundamental ethical and existential principle.

Each of us is called to draw a distinction between what we want and what we need, or – more importantly – what the world needs. Greed and gratification reduce the world to a survival of the fittest; whereas generosity and gratitude transform the world into a community of sharing.

We are invited to pursue a way of sacrifice – not a sacrifice that is cheap, but a sacrifice that is costly. As King David once said: *“I will not offer to the Lord my God a sacrifice that costs me nothing”* (2 Samuel 24.24). We must be prepared to make sacrifices – material and financial – that are genuine and even painful. And in this regard, whether we like it or not, more is demanded from the rich than from the poor.

HAH, Halki, Turkey, June 12, 2012

Q

What is the difference between wants and needs?

Distinguish between cheap and costly sacrifice? Which do you choose?

Why does HAH say we must be prepared to make sacrifices?

Reflection

Conservation and Compassion

There is a close link between the economy of the poor and the warming of our planet. Conservation and compassion are intimately connected. The web of life is a sacred gift of God – ever so precious and ever so delicate. We must serve our neighbor and preserve our world with both humility and generosity, in a perspective of frugality and solidarity alike.

Faith communities must undoubtedly put their own houses in order; their adherents must embrace the urgency of the issue. This process has already begun, although it must be 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. Our virtue can never be assessed in isolation from others, but is always measured in solidarity with the most vulnerable. Breaking the vicious circle of economic stagnation and ecological degradation is a choice, with which we are uniquely endowed at this crucial moment in the history of our planet.

HAH, Address before the World Council of Churches, August 12, 2005

Q

Is there a link between the economy of the poor and global warming?

How are spiritual commitment and moral ecological practice connected?

Why is solidarity with the most vulnerable virtuous?

Reflection

Man Made Disasters

Man-made disasters, which have been assuming an increasingly menacing scope as civilization is developing, reflect what is happening inside the human soul. Without a profound spiritual analysis of the role Man plays in the Universe such disasters cannot be prevented.

Many people have failed to learn the lessons of the Chernobyl catastrophe that mankind has been treating the land, water and air, and the entire environment merely as a consumer.

It is impossible and not worthwhile to try and stop the development of science and technology. But people will not be guaranteed against tragedies similar to the one that occurred twenty-five years ago if they do not learn to use the natural materials and the technical achievements of civilization wisely, with care for each other and everything God has created.

[Scientific and technological development] cannot be non-ethical. It must be combined with devotion to the eternal moral standards and the ideals of mutual respect and love. This is the guarantee of a worthy future for our people and the world as a whole.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All-Russia,
"Chernobyl is God's Punishment," April 27, 2011

Q

Why are man made disasters a reflection of the human soul?

How does the Chernobyl disaster exemplify seeing the environment as a consumer?

Why is scientific and technological development an ethical issue?

Reflection

All In the Same Boat

In the Arctic, melting glaciers are threatening the way of life of traditional hunters. In our home region of southern Europe, we have seen an alarming combination of heat waves, drought, fires and also floods. Scientists inform us that these phenomena are connected.

When we visited Brazil last year, the region was still recovering from a highly unusual drought. Brazilian scientists told us that illegal deforestation was leading to a decrease in rainfall and making fires more common. Fires and deforestation in Brazil are among the many factors which are altering the climate, and hence the environment, here on the northern edge of the earth.

These linkages ought to bring home to every nation and every community how closely involved it is with every other nation and community. It should be more obvious now than ever that no state or ethnic group or economic class can hope to advance its own interests indefinitely at the expense of the remainder of mankind. To restate a simple truth which has guided all of our floating symposia on Religion, Science and the Environment, “we are all in the same boat.”

HAH, Nuuk, Greenland, September 9, 2007

Q

How are traditional ways of life being threatened?

Why are melting glaciers and droughts in Southern Europe related?

How can mankind advance it's collective interests?

Reflections

A Grieving Earth

The holy hymnographer Joseph presents the earth as grieving and protesting voicelessly for the many evils with which we burden her.

If this holy hymnographer thought back then that the pollution of earth by humankind would cause the wrath of God today, humanity in its entirety should all the more realize our ultimate destructive behavior against the creation of God.

Certainly, the earth was created well-equipped to offer shelter to the human beings and was ordered by God to cover their needs. However, we do not draw from earth's resources what we need in moderation, so that we allow its productive ability to remain sound and intact; instead we are depleting her natural resources.

The aforementioned holy hymnographer Joseph personifies earth, which, addressing man, complains that the Master of humankind and God whips her instead of him, for God wants to spare the human being; the earth, however, bemoans her suffering due to humankind's mistakes and cries to people: "Come to your senses and appease God in repentance."

HAH, Day of Prayer for Creation, September 1, 2005

Q

Why is the earth grieving and protesting?

Why is it important to preserve the productive ability of the earth?

How do human beings come to their senses?

Reflection

A Lost Identity

We as Christians, taught by the Holy Tradition and by the experience of the Holy Church Fathers, link always the mentioned theme with the need of 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 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.

His Beatitude Patriarch Irinej, Metropolitan of Belgrade and All-Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church, 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

Reuniting the Universe Under Jesus Christ

Cosmology is a form of knowledge which is given to us in Christ by the Holy Spirit. “The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word,” wrote St. Maximus the Confessor, “contains within itself the whole meaning of the created world. He who understands the mystery of the Cross and the Tomb knows the meaning of all things, and he who is initiated into the hidden meaning of the Resurrection understands the purpose for which God created everything from the very beginning.”

If this is so, it means that everything has been created by and for the Word, as the Apostle says in Colossians 1:16-17, and that the meaning of this creation is revealed to us in the re-creation effected by the same Word taking flesh, by the Son of God becoming the son of the earth....

In this perspective the Fathers maintain that the historical Bible gives us the key to the cosmic Bible. In this they are faithful to the Hebrew notion of the Word, which not only speaks, but creates: God is “true” in the sense that his word is the source of all reality, not only historical, but also cosmic reality... That is why, as St. Maximos says, we discover, or rather the Gospel discovers for us, that on the one hand, the Word “hides himself mysteriously in created things like so many letters,” and on the other hand, “he... expresses himself in the letters, symbols and sounds of Scripture.”

HB Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, Zurich, Switzerland, March 10, 1989

Q

What is Christian cosmology?

What is the ‘Logos,’ referring to what HB calls the Incarnation of the Word?

How does this relate to the created world?

Reflection

Program Announcements

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration is offering a series of tools and programs to help you and those in your to parish develop awareness of creation care in your parish and in members.

The Face of God film: An Orthodox film on theology and climate change is in preparation. If you would like a showing of this film in your parish, please send a note to our office. Send to: Fred@Ecostewards.org

Books

The Greening of the Orthodox Parish

This is a comprehensive guide that provides vision, commentary from the saints, 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

Transfiguring the World: Orthodox Patriarchs and Hierarchs

The Orthodox patriarchs and bishops have been eloquent in articulating a healing ethic of the environment. Study of their writings provides an education on the vision and the mind of the Orthodox Church.

Programs

Christ in the Wilderness

Watch for a program announcement for this summer by early May.

This 2020 Reading-a-day program

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://faceofgodfilm.com/>

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