



# The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

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A Daily Reading Program on the Christian Theology of Creation

[www.Orth-Transfiguration.org](http://www.Orth-Transfiguration.org)

## **The Vision and Spiritual Direction of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Orthodox Patriarchs**

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

Month Eight  
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## Introduction

August is the month when the Orthodox Church celebrates Christ's Transfiguration. In Scripture the Transfiguration occurs before the Crucifixion and this prefigures Christ's Resurrection and Second Coming. Thus, during Christianity's first millennium, this feast was celebrated before the time of his Crucifixion. In our day, the liturgical calendar still retains some of this connection, because it occurs forty days before the Elevation of the Holy Cross, thus reminding us that "Christ's death is intimately connected to the glory of the Transfiguration, because Christ is glorified through his death" (John 12:23).

For perspective, every Feast of the Church must be more than simple commemoration. Each in its own way informs our lives and vitalizes our spiritual striving. As we celebrate Christ's Transfiguration, we recall that this event not only reveals his divinity, but also prefigures what awaits the entire cosmos – including us – at the end of time.

We discern the cosmic dimensions of this feast in several ways. First, as Christ prays, He shines from within, his face is as bright as the sun, and his garments glow with Light. Thus, Creation too is lifted and filled with uncreated Light. Second, the three apostles have their eyes and senses opened to witness Christ's glory. Third, Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, appear on either side, showing how the historical manifestations of God in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ's Transfiguration.

Fourth, Christ's Transfiguration reveals the ultimate destiny of humanity for we, along with all creation, are transformed and glorified in the splendor and Light of God. This is an intimation of the transformed state in which Christians shall appear at the culmination of the world, and to some extent, even before.

Fifth, according to the Greek Fathers, a Christian wisdom-knowledge of creation, grounded in prayer and contemplation, and manifested in ethically-informed acts, leads to a transformed consciousness and a transfigured world. This calls the faithful into awareness of a sacred earth stewardship which becomes sacred cosmology in action for the earth that consecrates every part of creation back to its Creator-Source. In this way we are all priests of creation with a duty to care for God's holy earth.

The Divine Liturgy on this day concludes with the blessing of grapes and other fruits, representing our blessing of the fruits of creation and invoking the eventual transfiguration of all things in Christ. This act signifies the flowering of creation in Christ where all will be transformed in and by the glory of the Lord. This blessing recognizes the teaching of the Church Fathers that the whole world is a living sacrament. This feast thus serves as a call for each Christian to strive toward illumination by the light of Christ and to enter into a loving and caring relationship with the earth, all of which is to be transformed and transfigured into the Kingdom of God.

Yours in service to God's good earth,

MR - ER - CB - EM - FK

## Humans as Custodians of Creation

As Christians we should find ways to work together to protect the Creation of God. Our Planet is the common residence for the whole of Humanity.

It's true that people in past times never managed to destroy our planet while living here for thousands of years, but now the most recent generations have managed to do this. The present risk of our planet being changed into a dangerous hot-house without ventilation constitutes a visible threat for all of us, like the plants of an enclosed hot-house which at stages wither, dry-up and die, unless we take active steps today.

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

HB Patriarch Theodoros II, Patriarch of Alexandria and All-Africa,  
September 8, 2010

### Q

How well can you summarize human responsibility to God for care of the earth?

What are the consequences of failure to observe this responsibility?

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

Reflection

## Sensitizing the Conscience

It is our duty of love towards our fellow human beings to sensitize the conscience of everyone. For, the indifference of each one of us toward our neighbor and the consequences of our actions has led to the current critical situation of the excess pollution of the seas as well as of many regions of the land. This indifference has disturbed the ecosystems and in many cases caused their destruction, with unfavorable results for humankind, such as the destruction of fisheries and agriculture in some places, the pollution of the atmosphere and waters by toxic materials, and other reversals of the natural environmental balance, which is necessary for the regular and healthy life of humanity.

From the Christian perspective, it is unethical to be indifferent toward the increasingly negative repercussions of our actions, simply because each of them has a small impact on the situation. Experience has shown that, beyond a certain degree of self-purification, the environment cannot recover its natural condition and is gradually dying.

We are obliged to become conscious of the truth concealed in the teaching of the Apostle Paul that we all constitute one body, and when one member suffers, all members suffer together. Any form of individualism, which leads us to care only for ourselves, is anti-Christian. We who believe in Christ have to live the truth that we are all one body, that we all have a common interest, and that we must seek not only our own, but also the interests of every person (Phil. 2,4).

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Uspenski Orthodox Cathedral,  
Helsinki, Finland, June 6, 2003

### Q

What is the human conscience?

How is it shaped?

How might a person become more sensitive to the voice of conscience?

Reflections

## Each Orthodox is Called to Traditional Principles

On August 6, 1945, humanity exploded the most powerful instrument of destruction with the atomic bomb, which created the brightest light ever created by man and which brought violent death to hundreds of thousands of people. In total contrast to this event of devastation, for centuries the Church has celebrated on August 6<sup>th</sup>, the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it was on Mount Tabor that he revealed himself as the uncreated Light of the World, Who brings life to all humanity.

Certainly, this is an extreme example, however, the juxtaposition of these two events provides a lens through which we see the influence human beings can have over God's creation. More so, we can apply this lens to the choices, large and small, that we encounter in our everyday lives. Do we choose means that are in any way destructive to address the needs, wants, and challenges of life, or do we focus on the transformative power that Christ provides to sustain us?

Saint Peter prophesizes, concerning the return of the Lord, that we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth. As we do so in this world, which has become very secular and consumeristic, it is the calling of each Orthodox Christian to become increasingly faithful and devoted to our traditional principles. Anticipating the coming perfection of all His creation, for our perpetual blessedness, let us respect and protect our present environment, for the benefit of humankind and for His greater glory.

HE Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, Greek Orth Archdiocese of America,  
Open Letter, August 2019

### Q

What are the traditional principles of the Orthodox Church?

How can Christians go about avoiding anything destructive in the way we live?

What things can Orthodox Christians do to protect the environment?

Reflection

## The Transfiguration of Creation

The Feast of the Transfiguration is supremely important for Orthodox Christians, for it points towards the eventual fate of us all. The light which Jesus shone on Mt Tabor is the uncreated light of God himself, a manifestation of theosis or deification. Not only will all the just be deified at the end of time, but the entire physical cosmos will be set free from corruption and decay.

Here, in a shrouded manner, is revealed to us all of the greatness, all the significance, not only of man, but of the material world.... And if we seriously and attentively accept what is revealed here, we must change as profoundly as we can our attitude toward everything visible, toward everything tangible; not only toward humanity, but toward everything around us that is physically perceptible, tangible, and visible... Everything is called to become the place of indwelling of the Lord's grace; everything is called to be at some time, drawn into that glory and to shine forth with that glory.

And it is granted unto us people to know that; and not only to know that, but to be co-workers with God in the illuminating of Creation.... Through human faith, the matter of this world is separated out, matter which through man's lack of faith, had been handed over to corruption, death and destruction, is set apart by the miracle of Transfiguration and Theophany. Through our faith, it is separated from this corruption and death, and is given over to God Himself, is accepted by God, and in God it fundamentally becomes a new creation...

Let us think about this; we are not called to enslave nature, but rather to free it from the prison of corruption and sin and death, to free it and to bring it back into harmony with the Kingdom of God. Therefore let us treat all created matter, all of the visible world, thoughtfully, with respect, and let us be in the world Christ's co-workers, so that the world might achieve its glory and through us, all of creation might enter into the joy of the Lord.

HE Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), Russian Orthodox Church,  
Diocese of Sourozh, London, UK, 1973

### Q

What happens at Christ's transfiguration?

Why do the Apostles Peter, James and John fall asleep?

What are the lessons of the Transfiguration for us today?

Reflection

## The Feast of the Transfiguration

Today, we celebrate the beautiful and bountiful presence of God's energies that radiate in all of creation.

Today's hymns and icons reveal the effect of God's transfiguration and illumination upon the whole creation. Because salvation and healing are not just spiritual enterprises; they are also material events. Every part and every particle of this world is elevated and embraced, lifted up and enlightened by God's power and presence. This means, as St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: "Wherever you turn, you will see a symbol of God; wherever you look, you can read the handwriting of God."

As you know, our patriarchal involvement in promoting awareness on creation care began many years ago and continues with the organization of regular ecological summits on an international level and the establishment of critical alliances with important institutions. In all that we do and say, we strive for an inter-religious and inter-disciplinary approach. Precisely because we are convinced that we can only achieve change when we work together, moved by the inspiration of God that created this universe and our planet out of love, and motivated by the preservation and protection of our world for the sake of future generations.

Of course, this world is not just a gift from God; it is a challenge for humanity. We have come to learn the truth that we have mistreated the natural environment and its resources. The consequences are plain and painful. They are evident in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we consume, the emotional and physical problems we face in our health, but also in our relationships with each other on the local, regional, national and global levels.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Feast of the Transfiguration,  
Island of Halki, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Q

How is the Feast of the Transfiguration a celebration of God's energies in creation?

How do you understand the world as a "challenge for humanity"?

Why is it that we can only achieve change when we work together?

Reflection

## Extending the Mystery of the Transfiguration

Within the entire Gospel story, the Transfiguration of Christ stands out as the ecological event *par excellence*.... Let us reflect on the significance of Christ's Transfiguration. It shows that matter can be transfused into spirit. It shows us how material things – not only Christ's face, hands and feet, but also his clothes; and not only the body of Christ, but also those of the three disciples upon whom the rays of light fall; and not they alone, but likewise the grass, trees, flowers and rocks of the mountain-side which share in the radiance from Christ – all these can be transformed, rendered luminous, filled with translucence and glory. The Transfiguration reveals the Spirit-bearing potentialities of all material things.

Christ, so the event on Mount Tabor makes clear, came to save not only our souls, but also our bodies. Moreover, we humans are not saved *from* but *with* the world. In and through Christ – and, by virtue of Christ's grace, in and through each one of us – the whole material creation, as Saint Paul expresses it, “will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

We human beings, in other words, are called to continue and 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 with freedom and self-awareness, entrusted with the power of conscious choice – as “sub-creators” formed in the image of God, 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 Kallistos [Ware] of Diokleia,  
Ravenna, Italy, June 6, 2002

### Q

How is Christ's transfiguration an ecological event?

What does Christ's Transfiguration teach us?

What might it mean to “enlarge the radiance” of the Transfiguration?

Reflection



## Transfiguration or Disfiguration

If nature is not transfigured, she becomes disfigured. Today we are threatened by barbarism and by the suicide of all mankind. By barbarism I mean the transformation of technology into destiny..., into an inevitable, death-like fatality. The fatality of doing all that we can, without first questioning the consequences.... As for the suicide of mankind, we are beginning to realize that it is possible, what with Chernobyl and the determination of the great financial organizations to destroy the forests of the Amazon....

Only the highest of forces, that of the spirit, and then that of spirit united with the heart, to use the language of the Orthodox tradition, can face up to the challenge of technology. Asceticism is necessary to fight against the instinct of possession, of blind power and a flight into hedonism....

Asceticism is also necessary as a basis for that profound sympathy with nature which is often experienced by today's youth, who have no other way into the mysterious other than the beauty of the world. This sympathy may prove to be the last barrier remaining against barbarism and against the destruction of the animal and plant world.

Michel Sollogoub, a French economist and an Orthodox of Russian descent, wrote, "the frenetic pursuit of the goods of this world secured for us a life marked by anxiety in the face of illness and death; the multiplicity of sensations produced by music or television causes us to forget the horror of nothingness; our neighbor is a competitor on his way to becoming an enemy, while nature becomes merely a means to satisfy our desires and our thirst for domination." Asceticism therefore is indispensable if we are to achieve that limitation of needs which will make it possible for us both to respect better the earth, its rhythms and the life which belongs to it, and to bring into operation the necessary sharing on a planetary scale.

His Beatitude Patriarch +Ignatius IV, Antiochian Orthodox Church,  
"The Responsibility of Christians," Lecture at the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches,  
Lucerne, Switzerland, March 12, 1989

### Q

What is asceticism?

How is it learned?

Why is asceticism important in the life of Christians?

Reflection

## The Quest for Peace

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

For Orthodox Christians, peace is not merely the cessation of hostilities. There is an ontological basis for peace, and that is love. Love of God, love of neighbor, love of the stranger, indeed, love of one's enemy, has existential impact in the phenomenal world.

Anywhere and everywhere we are able, as a religious leader, to advance the fundamental principles of faith traditions which they hold in common, we increase the possibilities for love. These potentialities manifest themselves as tolerance, respect, and even admiration.

When we proclaim, as we did in the Bosphorus Declaration, that 'a crime in the name of religion is a crime against all religion,' we have begun to set in place, the girders of the bridges that build unity out of diversity. Religious faith must be seen by temporal powers, as an advocate of reconciliation, and an instrument for peace.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,  
World Affairs Council, Los Angeles California, Nov 7, 1997

### Q

What is peace? How is it tied into the nature of God?

What does it mean to be at peace with the earth?

What is the basis for affirming that pollution is a crime against religion?

Reflection

## The Root Cause of Human Caused Disasters

Human-caused 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 fail to learn the lessons of the Chernobyl catastrophe that mankind has been treating the land, the water and the 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.

HB Patriarch Kyrill, Archbishop of Moscow and  
All-Russia, April 26, 2011

### Q

Why are human caused 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

## Climate Change Affects Everyone

The young people and coming generations have a right to a peaceful enjoyment of the natural environment whose integrity is cruelly violated to the great detriment of humanity. Ecological disasters, biological transformations and changes, and many other forms of abusive conduct of man over against divine creation and order, menace the survival itself of both humanity as well as that of the animal and plant kingdoms.

HAH, Istanbul, Turkey, June 18, 2000

Although the data regarding climate change is sometimes debated, the seriousness of the situation is generally accepted. Climate change affects everyone. Unless we take radical and immediate measures to reduce emissions stemming from unsustainable – in fact unjustifiable, if not simply unjust – excesses in the demands of our lifestyle, the impact will be both alarming and imminent.

Climate change is much more than an issue of environmental preservation. Insofar as human-induced, it is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem. To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is no less than suicidal, jeopardizing the diversity of the very earth that we inhabit, enjoy and share.

Climate change constitutes a matter of social and economic justice. For those who will most directly and severely be affected by climate change will be the poorer and more vulnerable nations (what Christian Scriptures refer to as our neighbor) as well as the younger and future generations (the world of our children, and of our children's children).

HAH, Message to World Council of Churches, August 12, 2005

### Q

Why do young people have a right to a peaceful natural environment?

How does climate change affect everyone?

Why is climate change a moral and spiritual problem?

Reflection

## God Entrusted the Earth to Human Care

HE Archbishop Lazar (Pohalo), from the Serbian Orthodox Church in Canada, writes the following in the Canadian Orthodox Missionary, 1989, in an article titled, “Living in the 20th Century.”

God gave man a clear responsibility for the condition of the earth.

If Orthodox Christians are the most exact followers of God and His commandments, then Orthodox Christians have the greatest responsibility for their attitudes and actions with regard to the condition of the earth and its atmosphere.

Remember, God entrusted the earth to our care. He did not give us a license to destroy it, but we are. Each one of us will have to give an account to God for our stewardship over His creation. To sin against the ecology of our earth is to sin against our neighbor and against all mankind. We will surely have to answer to God for that.

While most of us are aware of the ecological crisis around us, few of us realize that our Orthodox faith is profoundly concerned with ecology on the highest order. Indeed, if we actually tried to live our faith, we would be the foremost ecologists as well.

HE Archbishop Lazar, Serbian Orthodox Church, Synaxis magazine,  
Chilliwack, British Columbia, December, 1989.

### Q

Why do Orthodox Christians have a greater responsibility to care for the earth?

Why do humans pollute the earth?

What must change to correct this terrible tendency?

Reflection

## Climate Change: More Than Environmental Protection

Religious leaders throughout the world recognize that climate change is much more than an issue of environmental preservation. Insofar as it is human-induced, it is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem.

To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is no less than suicidal, jeopardizing the diversity of the very earth that we inhabit, enjoy and share. It has rightly been described... as a sin against God and creation. After all, a handful of affluent nations account for two thirds of global GDP and half of all global carbon dioxide emissions.

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

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,  
Aichi, Japan, September 20, 2005

### Q

How does science know that climate change is caused by human activity?

Why is accommodating climate change a sin against God?

What does it take for Christians to reduce their level of consumption?

Reflection

## Voluntary Restraint in the Use of Material Goods

We should consider every act in 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.

HAH, New York City, NY, November 13, 2000

### Q

What does the term “voluntary restraint” mean?

What is its purpose?

How does asceticism become an act of love?

Reflections

## We are Called to Cherish the Environment

It is clear that environmental problems stem from human egotism. Seeking to live as comfortably as possible, to consume as much as possible, people exhaust natural resources without thinking about the consequences.

In pursuit of momentary profit, human beings make the planet ever less suitable for life and trample upon God's creation – nature, thus distorting the design of the Heavenly Creator for the world and ever more strongly enslaving their spirit to flesh. Such a rapacious attitude to nature today dooms the generations to come to deprivations. Therefore, the principal cause of the ecological crisis is precisely the crisis of people's moral responsibility.

As the Bible tells us, God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it (Gen. 2:15). We are called to cherish the environment in the awareness of our responsibility for it before the Creator. Let the voices of our communities help us in this endeavor and may the present work of the Joint Commission serve the cause of the common witness of Christians and Muslims to the importance of preserving our home, the Earth, safe and intact.

His Beatitude Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia,  
Russian-Iranian Dialogue Commission,  
Teheran, Iran, May7, 2018

### Q

How does egotism relate to environmental problems?

What are the spiritual causes of environmental problems? Can you name them?

How might a person cherish the environment?

Reflections



## A Liturgical View of the World

Orthodox theology believes stewardship of creation is marked by a profound sense of justice and moderation. It underlines the priority of human beings as thankful to God for the gift of creation and as frugal in life with the resources of creation. In brief, it describes human beings as “Eucharistic” and “ascetic.” This means that the whole of material creation is properly perceived and preserved through the eyes of the liturgy. Each believer is called to celebrate life in a way that reflects the words of the Divine Liturgy: “Thine own from Thine own, we offer to Thee, in all and for all.”

Let us reflect briefly on these two words: “eucharistic” and “ascetic.” The implications of the first word are quite easily appreciated. The term derives from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning “thanks” and is understood also as the deeper significance of liturgy. In calling for a “eucharistic spirit,” the Orthodox Church reminds us that the created world is not simply our possession, but rather a gift of wonder and beauty. Therefore, the proper response, upon receiving such a gift, is to accept and embrace it with gratitude and thanksgiving. The abuse of this gift is identified with Adam’s “original sin,” which is the result of selfishness and greed.

The Eucharistic use of the world is exactly opposite from consumerism’s utilization of the world. To consume literally means to spend, to exhaust. In the mindset of consumerism the “goods” are just mere objects. They do not bear a particular sacredness, neither do they relate to the Creator and sustainer of all. With the cutting of and independence of things from God, we lose the meaning of the ‘other’ as our neighbor, who is now experienced as a competitor, since he or she claims the same things. That is how the meaning of community (*koinonia*), as well as the idea that man is a communicant (*koinonos*) is lost, and therefore we return to the war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*).

HAH, Faith and the Environment,” Utrecht,  
The Netherlands, April 24, 2014

Q

What is a eucharistic view of the world?

How does this cultivate a sacred sense of the world?

How then should we be living to counter the consumer mentality?

Reflection

## A World Without Hunger

Concern for ecological issues is directly related to concern for social justice and for world hunger. A Church that neglects to pray for the natural environment is a Church that refuses to offer food and drink to a suffering humanity. At the same time, a society that ignores the mandate to care for all human beings is a society that mistreats the very creation of God....

The terms “ecology” and “economy” share the same etymological root. Their common prefix “eco” derives from the Greek word *oikos*, which signifies “home” or “dwelling.” It is unfortunate that we have restricted the application of this word to ourselves, as if we are the only inhabitants of this world. The fact is no economic system – no matter how technologically or socially advanced – can survive the collapse of the environmental systems that support it. This planet is indeed our home; yet it is also the home of everyone, as it is the home of every animal, as well as of every form of life created by God. It is a sign of arrogance to presume that we human beings alone inhabit this world. Indeed, it is also a sign of arrogance to imagine that only the present generation inhabits this earth.

In our efforts to preserve the natural environment, how prepared are we to sacrifice our greedy lifestyles? When will we learn to say: “Enough!”? When will we learn that treating all people in a just manner is more beneficial than charitable acts of good will? Will we direct our focus away from what we want to what the world needs? We may offer bread to the hungry – indeed, we may feel a sense of self-gratification in so doing – but when will we work toward a world that has no hunger? Moreover, do we endeavor to leave as light a footprint as possible on this planet for the sake of future generations?

There are no excuses today for our lack of involvement. We have the information in abundant details; the statistics are readily available and alarming. We must choose to care. Otherwise, we do not really care.

HAH, Faith and the Environment,” Utrecht, The Netherlands, April 24, 2014

### Q

Why should we pray for the alleviation of world hunger?

What should we do to create a world that is beyond hunger? What is necessary?

How do we prepare for the future in our lives today?

Reflections

## The Challenge of Transformation

Over the last two decades, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has made the preservation of the natural environment a priority of its spiritual and pastoral ministry. The transformation of the heart and of the community is integrally linked with the healing of the earth. The relationship between the soul and its Creator, as well as among human beings, inevitably involves a balanced relationship with the natural world.

The way we treat each other is reflected in the way we treat our planet, just as the way we respond to other people is mirrored in the way we respect the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we consume. In turn, moreover, our protection of the natural environment reveals the measure of authenticity in our prayer and worship.

For whenever we narrow religious life to our own concerns, we overlook the prophetic calling of the church to implore God and to invoke the divine Spirit for the renewal of the whole polluted cosmos. Indeed, the entire cosmos is the space within which transformation is enacted.

When we are transformed by divine grace, we can properly discern the injustice in which we are active participants and not merely passive observers. When touched by the grace of God, we weep for the "dis-grace" that we have caused by failing to share the resources of our planet.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Transformation Calls for Metanoia,"  
Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 26, 2006

### Q

How is a person transformed?

What does the term 'metanoia' mean?

Why must we share the resources of the planet?

Reflection

## Climate Change as a Moral and Spiritual Problem

Religious leaders throughout the world recognize that climate change is much more than an issue of environmental preservation. Insofar as it is human-induced, it is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem.

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HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Aichi, Japan, September 20, 2005

### Q

What is economic justice?

How does economic justice relate to global climate change?

Why do American's consume more resources than people in other countries?

Reflection

## Orthodox Theology Applied to the Environment

Ecological problems are worldwide. Pollution of the environment is not limited by national boundaries, since its consequences effect all living beings. It does not only concern this generation, but also those to come. Our planet is one in common and the violation of nature in a certain part of the world has unpreventable effects on the rest of the planet.

Orthodoxy's interest and theology concerning the protection of the environment and its spirituality really differ from contemporary deep ecology. The difference lies not so much in the level of desire to preserve and to protect the natural resources of the world, which should be the priority of all human beings.... It lies primarily in the worldview that is presented. The difference may be detected less in the way we perceive the end result, which must certainly be sought and achieved by everyone and for the sake of everyone. Rather, it is discerned as the starting-point of our attitudes and actions.

Orthodox theology believes stewardship of creation is marked by a profound sense of justice and moderation. It underlines the priority of human beings as thankful to God for the gift of creation and as frugal in life with the resources of creation. In brief, it describes human beings as "eucharistic" and "ascetic." This means that the whole of material creation is properly perceived and preserved through the eyes of the liturgy. Each believer is called to celebrate life in a way that reflects the words of the Divine Liturgy: "Thine own from Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in all and for all."

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,  
Utrecht, The Netherlands, April 24, 2014

**Q**

What does it mean in Orthodox theology that humans are "eucharistic" beings?

How are they also ascetic in behavior?

How does the Divine Liturgy shape the behavior of the faithful?

Reflection

## Respecting the Life of the World

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

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

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

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

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

### Q

Why should Orthodox Christians respect animals and nature?

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

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

Reflection

## Faith and Science in Cooperation

In the early days of our endeavor, many people were puzzled by the links we were trying to establish. Religious people were relatively indifferent or even hostile to science. Many scientists and ecologists could see little relationship between their world and the world of faith.

Now, as those connections have become more obvious, there is hardly a religious leader in the world who is not preoccupied by the problems of pollution and climate change. And this is the reason why we have among us today distinguished representatives of many faiths. As more and more people realize, religion and environmental science are both concerned with ultimate matters, with the final destiny of mankind, the earth and the whole of creation.

Scientists tell us that the Arctic is a stark and vivid reflection of the state of the planet as a whole. The ecological misdeeds committed by societies further south, such as chemical contamination or nuclear radiation, are clearly visible in parts of the Arctic environment. When we visit this island or sail along its coast, we cannot hide our eyes, either from the beauty of God's creation or from the changes which human folly has already caused, and may cause in the future, to this pristine place. Nor can we avoid pondering the terrible consequences for the remainder of the world, if glaciers continue to melt and sea-levels continue to rise.

HAH, Ilulissat, Greenland, September 7, 2007

### Q

Can religion and science find cooperation?

Why are some religious people indifferent or hostile to science?

How are religion and science both concerned with ultimate matters?

Reflection

## Access to Water as a Christian Issue

While conflict and persecution are reasons for the current displacement of millions of people, the lack of access to basic services such as potable water is a major reason for the forced migration and evacuation of populations from the Middle East and Northern Africa. Such displacement places additional pressure on host communities in neighboring countries – especially in Europe. Of course, establishing superficial connections between water scarcity and migration are not always helpful and may even lead to incorrect policy responses. Nevertheless, water scarcity should be acknowledged as one of several factors contributing to migration.

However, unless we appreciate the danger – indeed, we might even describe it as “the sin” – of refusing to share the planet’s natural resources, we will increasingly face severe challenges and conflicts. It is, therefore, up to us – and all of you – to pay close attention to these connections and advocate for access to clean water for every human being.

The respect for human dignity and the integrity of creation... will be a main criterion of humanity’s cultural standards and achievements... for generations to come. This is why our commitment to protect the natural environment has always been connected to social justice and respect for human rights. The example of water as an inherent good, its access as a human right and its sacredness by religions – together with human migration due to climate change and violence – reveal the deeper dimension of our problems in the world, and demand an urgent and unanimous response, which cannot succeed without the contribution of world religions and their collaboration with politics and economy, science and technology. Let us act, then, and not put off for tomorrow what can be done today!

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,  
22nd Eurasian Economic Summit,  
Istanbul, February 7, 2019

### Q

Why is water availability a religious issue?

How does Christianity understand the issue of the privatization of water?

How might a parish - or individual Christians - address an issue of this sort?

Reflection



## Blessing Creation to Respect God's Handiwork

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

HAH, Manaus, Brazil, July 14, 2006

In blessing the waters of the great Amazon, we proclaim our belief that environmental protection is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem that concerns all of us. The initial and crucial response to the environmental crisis is for each of us to bear personal responsibility for the way that we live and for the values that we treasure and the priorities that we pursue.

To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is a sin against God and creation.

HAH, Manaus, Brazil, July 16, 2006

## Q

Why is protection of the environment a moral and spiritual issue?

How are we all personally responsible for the environmental crisis?

Why is environmental degradation and pollution sins against God?

Reflections

## The Challenge of Living More 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

What is the value of simple living? What principles are involved?

Why is sacrifice a virtue?

How can sharing transform the world?

Reflection

## Restoring an Orthodox Worldview

We have repeatedly stated that the crisis that we are facing in our world is not primarily ecological. It is a crisis concerning the way we envisage or imagine the world.

We are treating our planet in an inhuman, godless manner precisely because we fail to see it as a gift inherited from above; it is our obligation to receive, respect and in turn hand on this gift to future generations. Otherwise, the unquenchable greed of our generation will constitute a mortal sin resulting in destruction and death. This greed in turn will lead to the deprivation of our children's generation, in spite of our desire and claim to bequeath to them a better future.

Ultimately, it is for our children that we must perceive our every action in the world as having a direct effect upon the future of the environment.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,  
Foreword, *Witness for the Earth*, April 12, 2011

Q

What does it require to sense and recall that God is in and vitalizing all things?

Why do we so easily forget this sacred vision of creation?

What would the world be like if we remembered our vision of God in all things?

Reflection

## Stewards of the Environment

Beloved brothers and spiritual children: Use the natural environment as its stewards and not as owners. Acquire an ascetic *ethos*, bearing in mind that everything in the natural world, whether great or small, has importance for the life of the world, and nothing is useless or contemptible.

Regard yourselves as being responsible before God for every creature and treat everything with love and care.

Only in this way shall we be able to prevent the threatening destruction of our planet and secure a physical environment where life for the coming generations of humankind will be healthy and happy....

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch +Dimitrios, September 1, 1990

Q

What is a steward of the environment? What actions are involved?

How can we be responsible before God for every creature?

How might the full application of stewardship prevent destruction of the planet?

Reflection

## Prayers for Environmental Protection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Q

Why must Christians respect and protect the environment?

If we fail in this responsibility, what happens?

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

Reflection

## Program Announcements

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

### [The Face of God film](#)

An Orthodox film on our theology of creation 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. Meanwhile, please pray for our film, that we find the inspiration and direction to make this a blessing for the whole Church. Send requests for showings to: [Fred@Ecostewards.org](mailto:Fred@Ecostewards.org)

### 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](http://www.Amazon.com)

#### *[Transfiguring the World: Orthodox Patriarchs and Hierarchs Speak](#)*

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 2020](#)

Watch for a program announcement for this fall (delayed by coronavirus)

#### [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/>

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