

The Orthodox Church addresses the climate crisis



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Theodota Nantsou & Nikolaos Asproulis
(eds.)

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Foreword

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

It is with great joy that we welcome this publication on the vital role of the Orthodox Church in advocating climate action and advancing environmental protection in the Mediterranean and the Balkan countries.

Over several decades, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has pioneered numerous conferences and consultations as well as initiated diverse programs and practices with a view to raising concerns about the ecological crisis and encouraging changes in personal attitudes and institutional policies. However, as we all know very well, while it is undoubtedly crucial to think globally, it is equally critical to act locally. Or, as we have said in the past, the most difficult journey is from the head to the heart and then to the hand. We cannot remain satisfied with sweeping statements; we are called to direct our attention and our action to our immediate neighborhood in order to address the challenges engendered or exacerbated by climate change.

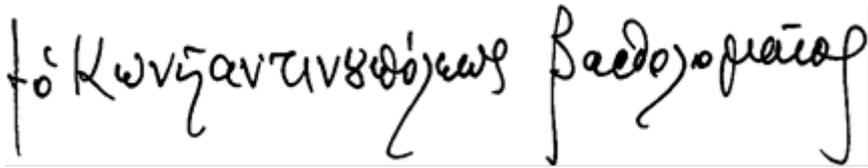
In the specific case of the Orthodox Church, this means that we are obliged first of all and above all to put our own house in order. This implies considering the impact of pollution on our faithful in regions most densely populated by Orthodox Christians. It involves responding to the need for a climate-friendly economy and energy stemming directly from the fundamental principles of our theology and tradition. Moreover, it includes reflecting critically on potential solutions - such as the European Green Deal - which aspires to a climate neutral European Union by the year 2050, in order to transform and guide our societies toward a more sustainable future for the sake of leaving behind a cleaner, safer, and fairer world.

In this respect, the Orthodox Churches in the Balkans - in Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria - have a paramount responsibility and momentous role to play in raising awareness and shepherding change in cultural perceptions and social convictions. They are unquestionably important and indispensable players in reminding Orthodox faithful as well as all people of good will about the inseparable link between creation and Creator and about the moral injunction to care for and safeguard “the earth and the fullness thereof that belong to the Lord” (*Psalms* 24,1).

Finally, not only should we remember the direct connection or correlation between heaven and earth, but we must also recognize the clear implication or impact that our spiritual and religious life has on “the least of our brothers and sisters” (*Matthew* 25,40) - on social justice and an equitable economy, on questions of unemployment and poverty, as well as on problems related to immigration. Our response to climate change emanates from our faith, but it affects our everyday life. This is why the Church must continue to work toward and facilitate a local and regional response to the ethical and existential threat of the climate crisis.

How tragic and ironic it would be if, as church leaders and religious believers, we were confronted with the question: “Why did you not care for and sustain the earth that I instructed you to serve and to preserve, ‘to till and to keep’ (*Genesis 2,15*)?” Our fervent hope and prayer is that those who read this book will be inspired to modify their lives and motivate similar responses within their communities.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the 5th of August 2020

A handwritten signature in Greek script, likely the signature of the Ecumenical Patriarch, written in black ink on a white background.

BARTHOLOMEW
Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch

Statement

THE PATRIARCH OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, IRINEJ (†)

Modernity confronts us with many dilemmas. Man must answer challenges, and not only those for which his teachers in his educational-upbringing process prepared him, but also totally new and different problems that life places before us. And it has always been so. Still, sociologists, pedagogues and culturologists generally agree that today's world is changing at a significantly faster pace than before. The technological progress and social innovations of the 20th century have transformed the world much faster than, for instance, the entire process of technological development during medieval times. This process is characterized by a loss of values. Today's world functions as a marketplace, meaning that the market economy principle is seeking to impose itself as the general norm.

The person is the central axiological notion of Christianity: the person is the measure of all values because it expresses the very designation of the human being, its possibility and its goal to be in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1,26*). To be sure, the concept of person is not only a Christian category: more precisely, it is possible to also find it in other philosophical and theological conceptions. Nevertheless, only Christianity has produced an integral ontology of personality and established a corresponding personal pedagogy on its basis. It would be wrong to see this personal pedagogy as a theoretical principle; it should be, rather, seen as the living experience of the Church, founded before all in Christ's Theandric personality. In that way – through an Christological steadfastness of being and

faith - as partakers in the new soteriological existence of Redemption and Integration we can meet the challenges of modernity.

But, egotism encourages us to view the world as an opportunity for acquisition and enjoyment: at every Divine Liturgy, St. John Chrysostom reminds us to “commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.” A Man who is a captive of egotism is not able to build the right relationship either with God or with other people: “when there is a feeling of higher worth, it does not only damage relations between people, it also clouds the relationship with God... egotism undermines all life, which is why it is worth applying oneself towards its eradication.” That is why the entire Liturgy is one great reminder to firstly overcome our own “I” in order to achieve communion in the life of the New Creation, in the future Kingdom.

Where we have to live in the contemporary world? Only in the place where truth resides – in Christ’s Church, in its dogmas and its worldview that is, before all – liturgical. Truly, as a cosmic event, Liturgy cannot “fail” to witness to the world its true designation in communion with God.

In facing the “crisis” of each epoch, as well modern era, which is, in fact, just a manifestation of the perpetual eschatological “crisis” of this world, the eschatological judgment over this world that has, in the words of Christ, already begun with His Incarnation: “And this is the condemnation: that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (*John* 3,19), the Church’s basic method is the witnessing of God-Man Christ, God the Logos Incarnate, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

The Church has never avoided facing the crisis of the world that it was supposed to change, due to its experiential knowledge that crisis – is the ontological state of the world until Christ’s Second

Coming. There is no other world than the “world in crisis”; it is a world that the Church loves, that it does not anathematize for its sinfulness but, rather, lavishes it with “works of love in Truth.”

Respected theologians of the Serbian Orthodox Church began to raise serious concerns about environmental crisis and urgent problems of global warming, floods, risk of forest fires, sea pollution from plastics, climate changes, etc. Pastors and theologians of the Church before all, as well as Christians in general, have always erred, missed and betrayed their ecclesial task whenever they argued and matched wits with “this world” and their epoch using methods and arguments of “religious reason,” straining to prove the world’s sinfulness and condemning it, from the heights of their supposed “salvation,” to eternal perdition while, in fact, completely and irresponsibly abandoning it to the power of anthropolatric ideologies and manipulations. And, on the other hand, Church pastors and theologians have always triumphed over the world and won it over for Christ’s “easy yoke” (*Matthew 11,30*) whenever they have witnessed to it Christ’s Love for the life of the world, liturgical love and sacrifice “in all and for all.”

What is expected of contemporary Christians, as responsible members of Christ’s Church, is neither aloof diagnosing of spiritual “illness” nor pronouncements of the “ruination of the world,” nor panicked anathematizing of “this world” and its apostatic modernity, but a responsible witnessing of the Truth of God-Man Christ, and an unmasking of all the anthropolatric ideologies, falsities, misconceptions and injustices through the love of Christ. The basis of Christian witnessing in the modern world must be a liturgical love for that world, a love prepared to sacrifice for the life of the world, instead of a dualistic puritanism that, from the heights of its righteous self-satisfaction, abhors the “world (that) lieth in wickedness” (*1 John 5,19*) and anathematizes it, hating, along with sin, the sinners

themselves, contrary to the example of Christ, Who came into the world for the sake of the sinners, to call them to repentance (cf. *Matthew 9,12-13*).

The loss of the Christian experience of life, worldview, criterion of everything and value system is the mark of the modern fall of the “Christian historical world.” After twenty centuries of her baptismal-resurrectional history, the Church finds herself once again in a situation of existing in a world that is no longer “hers,” that is no longer a Christian world, that defines itself as a “post-Christian” world, a “world after Christianity,” a world that no longer bases itself on Christian foundations and assumptions, that is either indifferent or openly rejects the Christian theory and practice of life, thought and action, i.e., Christianity as a whole, together with its theology and anthropology, ontology, ethics and esthetics, cosmology and ecology. We have a crucial role as Orthodox Church in encouraging the world’s response to the climate and ecological crisis through Church as Body of Christ. We give a clear message for Orthodox climate leadership, focusing primarily on the Balkan Peninsula and Mediterranean, which is facing mounting challenges caused or exacerbated by climate change and the broader environmental crisis.

The experience of the entire creation (the World) as Home (of all of us), is possible exclusively and solely from that which is the Wholeness of Heaven and earth, history and the Eschaton – from the Body of Christ and in the Body of Christ, Christ’s Church, which is larger and higher and more encompassing than the world, “which surpasses Heaven itself,” which contains within herself not only the entire cosmos, not only the visible but also the invisible world, “all worlds” “life, immortality and eternity, and theandricity.” That is because graceful-ascetic knowledge of God is the source of all other human knowledge – self-knowledge (anthropology) as well as knowledge of the world (cosmology, ecology).

The ascetic experience of the Fathers, i.e., the “renunciation of the (fallen) world,” commanded to us by God-Man Christ Himself (“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me...” – *Matthew 16,24*), “lies in the very nature of the Christian philosophy of life and means a radical change of relationship with the world and with oneself, and a change of the way of life, behind which lies a demand for freedom that only the Holy Spirit can grant.”

Let us all recall the commands of God regarding our use of the earth as Our Home. Let us respond to the divine commandments so that the blessings of God may be abundantly upon us in Liturgy and prayers. And let us responsibly discern the right, holy and proper way to live in this time of change and challenge, as a life in Church as a Body of Christ.

Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Irinej (†)
Belgrade, Serbia
September 2020

Foreword

LAURENCE TUBIANA

As I write these lines, we are witnessing a human-induced climate crisis as well as the 6th wave of extinction – which is not far away neither in place nor in time. All parts of the world, including the Balkans, will suffer from it; young generations aware of the gloomy prospects of the future are already awakening and demanding action. Human development in the last century imbued our actions with powers that have never been seen before in human history. This power has particularly affected temperature changes and rises in sea levels, which affect us all.

Ethical principles need to guide both the continuation of such human activity and economic development, and the measures we will need to take to adapt to climate change impacts. In view of the magnitude and novel nature of the climate crisis, we need to look to the canons of traditional ethics and values, and see how we can use and extend them for these unique circumstances. We need to look into the core values of our societies, many of which, especially in the Balkan region, have been shaped to a large extent by the Orthodox Church. In this regard, Eastern Orthodoxy can boldly contribute to a change of ethical practices and to develop a vision for the Balkan people of a more ecofriendly, human-friendly way of life. This book is providing an important contribution to this process.

The ecological transition, together with a transition in our values and perceptions of growth and a good life, are essential to address the dramatic changes we are facing. Religions are guardians of values, and preserving and shepherding the biosphere and its supporting systems in their richness should be kept as profound values. The Church can help to remind us that we are part of and dependent on these infinitely elaborate systems, each of them a miracle in itself. Seeing these miracles being demolished and suffering from anthropogenic impacts is a process taking part of the value of our life and of future generations away from us.

Isn't this hubris?

On a global level the Paris Agreement (2015) provides the framework to address the looming climate crisis. It has the mechanism and the structure, but governments have to put their full political will behind it and act upon their commitments with the seriousness required when the fate of our children depends on them.

Closer to us, the energy sector transition is already happening in some parts of the Balkans and will accelerate in the coming years. This transition is adversely impacting local communities dependent on lignite mining and lignite-based power generation – the Church can offer important support to the communities in transition. Helping the transition and thus leaving no one behind is at the core of the EU Green Deal: a unique opportunity for Europe to reorient its national economies and societies towards more sustainable pathways which can help to heal the rift in the co-existence of humanity with the environment.

I understand that in Greece, venerable monasteries in Mount Athos have already shown the way by utilizing solar power for their needs. The Orthodox Church thus already demonstrates not only that it can lead the spiritual way but also is able to provide examples

of good deeds in physical terms toward our common environment, our common future.

But too many people have not yet recognized the climate crisis and the threat to our lives and for the generations next to us; unfortunately, there are even those who deny the problem or deliberately mislead people about the level of the severity of the danger. The Church has provided a prophetic voice in many crisis periods of humanity, and that is perhaps needed now more than ever. There is no question that climate change, with its unequal impacts, is coming, and all those who can help have the moral imperative to do so.

We need to re-learn humility and to be humble in our approach towards the biosphere, perhaps through better understanding than by the calamities we bring on ourselves by the destruction of the environment. We need unity, understanding, solidarity, support for those in need, protection for the poor and most vulnerable - so that our world and our civilization can survive without major sacrifices.

The climate crisis hits the poor and the vulnerable people the hardest. Providing extra care and support for the poor and vulnerable is a challenging task, but one where the Church has always been a leader and can offer a helping hand.

This book came to existence with the hope and eagerness to trigger a process of self-reflection and action where the Orthodox Church is setting an example, giving guidance, and supporting the vulnerable communities in the process of addressing the global crisis.

Foreword

MARCO LAMBERTINI

The health and vitality of human societies is intricately linked with the health of our planet. Paraphrasing the well-known saying, that “every text has a context,” one can say that the very context of humanity is this one planet and nothing less. Without a context, nobody can understand the true meaning of a text. Without this planet, life ceases to exist. As humanity is currently facing the unprecedented crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all alarmingly becoming aware of the far-reaching repercussions of the heavy footprint of economies and lifestyles on our planet’s natural boundaries, while the climate crisis is finally widely recognized as one of the most defining issues of our times.

Connecting people with our planet and building a future in which humans live in harmony with nature is at the core of WWF’s mission. Such a mission resonates with major faiths, and Christianity is definitely one of those. The role of these religions, whose teachings and traditions are rich in ecological meaning, is profound in highlighting the ethical and existential dimensions of this ontological relationship, which very often is being forgotten.

Earlier this year, I was truly impressed to hear the powerful words of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the primate of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, at the 2020 meeting of world leaders at the *World Economic Forum*:

[i]t is comforting and promising to witness so many diverse categories of people – many of them here among us in Davos! – increasingly accepting the challenge and embracing the urgency of climate change. The fact that we are here today as concerned citizens and leaders makes us optimistic. However, we can no longer transfer the responsibility to others; we cannot afford to shift the blame elsewhere. There is no excuse for any delay ... In order to restore the balance of our planet, we need a spiritual worldview, which promotes humility, respect and solidarity.

Translating the deep ecological ethos of Orthodoxy into action is becoming everyday practice in many parts of the world. For example, monasteries in Greece and Mount Athos, are using renewable energy systems that generate the electricity they need without polluting the environment. Also, many Orthodox monastic communities in Europe and other parts of the world implement state-of-the-art practices in protecting and managing their lands, true to the spiritual guidance of Patriarch Bartholomew. Brilliant beacons of hope for the planet as these examples may be, we look forward to the Orthodox Church evolving them into the new normality for all Orthodox communities, while at the same time supporting the just and inclusive transition of societies currently dependent on fossil fuels, to healthy and sustainable economic development.

As communities around the globe are adapting to the realities of the accelerating climate crisis, it is important that Church leaders support the smooth and inclusive transition from high carbon dependence towards zero carbon sustainable economies and vibrant societies. Moving away from fossil fuels, while building a healthier and brighter future for all people, within the natural boundaries of our planet's ecosystems and climate, is a shared responsibility which world political and spiritual leaders need to uphold in universal unity, leaving aside political, ethnic or religious differences.

The current rate of global warming and loss of biodiversity is unprecedented in human history. Our chances to limit the rise of the planet's mean temperature to 1.5°C are diminishing fast, while more than one million species are on the brink of extinction, according to WWF's Living Planet Report. Risks resulting from environmental degradation, such as climate disasters, and massive loss of natural resources – are now widely seen as the biggest challenges facing humanity.

The time to halt climate change and the loss of our planet's biodiversity is now. Action on an unprecedented scale is needed. In these times of crisis for the planet and people, we need all good hearts on the same side and all hands on deck, in order to reverse the global trend towards apocalyptic nature collapse and climate chaos.

In 2021, international efforts will focus on persuading decision-makers and governments to pursue ambitious and binding targets for decarbonisation and nature conservation, embracing the double global goal of a carbon neutral and nature positive society. A society that develops ensuring no one is left behind, while avoiding the destabilization of the climate and the destruction of the natural world. Now more than ever, the world needs a new (green) deal for people and the planet, which will set humanity on a course of urgent action towards a prosperous future for all. The recovery from COVID-19 needs to be a sustainable one. It is promising that the EU and certain governments are committing to strategies for green recovery. It goes without saying, that the role of religions in making this change a reality is crucial, through cultivating the necessary individual and social responsibility but also by paving the way for a new vision where humanity and nature can co-exist.

The articles featured in this important book, which is opened by Patriarch Bartholomew's powerful calling on the Orthodox Church-

es to shepherd “change in cultural perceptions and social convictions,” offer a valuable insight into the vital role of Christianity in helping build a resilient, just and sustainable world, for all people and generations to follow.

Introduction

NIKOLAOS ASPROULIS & THEODOTA NANTSOU

It is widely recognized that the *Paris Agreement*, the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015) the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, as well as the numerous international initiatives undertaken by H.A.H. the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (organization of international conferences for the protection of the Amazon, the Black Sea, etc., the establishment of September 1st as a day of prayer for the protection of the environment, the Halki Summit series of workshops, and many other events and publications), widely known as the Green Patriarch, constitute a hopeful sign towards the impactful public awareness for the protection of the climate. The major Christian Churches and denominations as well as respected theologians have seriously begun to worry about the climate crisis and its impact on people's daily lives. Global warming, heavy precipitation events, floods, increasing risk of forest fires, biodiversity loss, and sea pollution from plastics, or even quite dangerous pandemics such as Covid-19, are only some of the challenges that put in jeopardy the life of humanity and the very sustainability of the whole planet. Following this line, the *European Green Deal-towards a climate neutral EU by 2050*, recently issued by the European Commission, did not come out of the blue. On the contrary, it follows the long endeavor (although not always express-

ing a strong and clear vision) of European institutions to take the lead towards a deep transformation of our life by addressing the critical and timely thread of climate change. In doing so, the European Green Deal suggests certain and deeply transformative policies (modernization of the European economy, supplying clean and affordable energy, mobilizing industry for a clean economy, building in an energy and resource efficient way etc.) for a sustainable future, taking into account, at least in principle, to not leave someone behind (just transition).

Given this situation, what could the Churches in general, and the Orthodox Churches in Balkans in particular, offer not only to the relevant discussion but also in dealing with the consequences that will arise from these intended changes? Countries like Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine further north, where Orthodoxy has historically played an important role in shaping the life and culture of these people, are among those parts of Europe that will be seriously confronted with a number of such challenges as a result of the need to adopt the proposed European policy, as one of the last measures to reverse the environmental catastrophe. Even though certain local governments may not easily agree for a variety of reasons (ideological or cultural, it does not matter) to always follow such profound and necessary, albeit painful changes, the Orthodox Churches should be ready to address the problem in terms of theology and pastoral care. Being based on their rich theological vision and tradition (for instance, incarnational theology, asceticism, Eucharistic ethos, priest of creation, sacred materialism, etc.), the Orthodox Churches are then invited to stand by the people, and especially the needy and poor (e.g. who will lose their jobs) to deal with this tremendous change, while at the same time provide certain insights of how and why (Christian) faith, Churches and faith communities in general really matter to environmental issues.

The present volume contains a selection of texts which represent different contexts from the Balkan era, describe different problems and needs, but also express the common vision of the local Orthodox Churches which bear the fruits of the creation of God and have been entitled to cope with the pain of the people in any place.

The book begins with a bold message by H.A.H. the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who strongly highlights on the paramount responsibility and momentous role, that the Orthodox Churches in the Balkans have to play in raising awareness and shepherding change in cultural perceptions and social convictions.

The late Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church Irinej describes the context which needs to shape the debate on the relationship between the Church and the environmental problem that is modernity should take place.

Laurence Tubiana CEO of the European Climate Foundation calls on Eastern Orthodoxy to boldly contribute to a change of ethical practices and to develop a vision for the Balkan people of a more ecofriendly, human-friendly way of life.

WWF International's Director General Marco Lambertini refers to the Church leaders who need to support the smooth and inclusive transition from high carbon dependence towards zero carbon sustainable economies and vibrant societies.

Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Zizioulas) in his interview focuses on the role the Church can play in protecting the environment providing some general guidelines by virtue of her life and tradition still useful in our time.

Based on his long pastoral experience in a small city (Volos) in the Greek province, Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias offers a constructive re-interpretation of the eco-theological and anthropological elements of the rich ecclesiastical tradition in order to inspire a new and badly needed eco-ethos.

A bishop from the lignite region of Western Macedonia, Metropolitan Pavlos of Servia and Kozani, reflects on certain aspects of the Christian tradition that could help the Church in its endeavor to stand by the people in need that would most be affected by the ongoing transition process to the post-coal era.

Bishop Ignatije of Pozarevac and Branicevo, a region which is home to lignite thermal power plants, like Kozani, reflects on the roots of environmental degradation, while he focuses on relational ontology as a means by which the Church can inspire a new ethos and way of life in the midst of the present crisis.

Theodota Nantsou, Head of Policy at WWF Greece, gives us the bigger picture of the critical situation facing our planet, focusing on the climate crisis. She then stresses the important role of the Orthodox Church in changing attitudes and encouraging climate action, by highlighting good practices.

Nikolaos Asproulis, Deputy Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, provides a sketch of the basic doctrinal contours (e.g. *creatio ex nihilo*) that must underlie any green that is eco-theological, account.

Sveto Riboloff, Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Sofia, offers a survey of theological education in Bulgaria and the position (if any) of ecological topics in the academic curricula, while he voices criticism towards the indifference of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the face of the environmental crisis.

Thymio Papayannis, President Emeritus of WWF Greece explores the links between Christianity and climate change in the midst of the current Covid-19 pandemic, addressing the social impact of the situation.

Zvezdan Kalmar, from the Centre for Ecology and Sustainable Development, a Serbian NGO, focuses on the causes of climate crisis and pollution, while highlighting the economic dimensions of

the debate. He fervently calls on all Christians to show zero tolerance towards the fiscal, technological, legal and institutional manipulations that produce pollution and destruction of nature.

The book concludes with a priestly call by an environmentalist Greek priest, Rev. John Economides who provides a pastoral view of environmental disaster in his local setting, a parish in an industrial area in Attica (Greece) Father John calls on Christians to be part of the solution through their own way of life and to take action in pressing governments to stop making environmentally destructive choices.

We are grateful to Fr. Stamatis Skliris, one of the greatest contemporary painters of Byzantine art. Fr. Stamatis's painting decorates the cover of this book, highlighting the deeper cosmological meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

As editors, we are deeply grateful to all who contributed with enthusiasm to the completion of this publication. We strongly believe that the book at hand can become in its own right a herald for change addressing not only the Orthodox Churches but people from all communities in the Balkans, especially as humanity faces the "ultimate enemy" of our planet, the rapidly unfolding climate crisis.

The Role of Eastern Orthodoxy in Addressing the Climate Crisis

Interview with His Eminence
METROPOLITAN JOHN (ZIZIOULAS) OF PERGAMON

What is the role and responsibility of the Church in a world where the risks of environmental and climate catastrophes increase as a result of the scientifically proven responsibility of humanity?

The Church, both by her very nature and through her teaching, can only have a reason for, and responsibility towards, protection of the natural environment. The Church believes - and this is especially emphasized by Eastern Orthodoxy - that she exists to sanctify and unite all creation and to highlight it as something sacred, which contains within it the presence of God himself, and therefore offers it to God as Eucharist, as “Thine own of Thine own,” during the Divine Liturgy. Any insult to the creation of God, either by disturbing its natural laws and the damage or extinction of its species, or by the misuse of natural resources, is for the Church an insult to God himself and, therefore, a sin. The Church, therefore, both with her preaching and teaching, and, above all, with her very existence, can only be anxious and protest when she sees our natural environment being destroyed by human greed and human interventions. The Church, of course, does not have the legal power to impose on people respect for our natural environment, but she must exercise all its

moral influence on society and, on the competent bodies of authority, starting from her own members and the faithful, to prevent and deter actions that harm the environment.

In many areas that have based their economies on the extraction and use of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, the world's shift towards climate neutrality and the elimination of pollution has made a significant difference. How can the Church stand by and support communities in transition? How can this transition be just and socially beneficial?

This question raises a delicate and difficult issue. There is no doubt that the Church must encourage and strengthen in every way the transition from an economy based on the extraction and incineration of fossil fuels, which pollute the environment, to other, non-polluting energy sources. This means that many people will lose their jobs and unemployment will be created, followed by serious social consequences. Finding a solution to this problem is primarily the responsibility of the state, which has the ability and responsibility to redistribute financial resources and labor structures in a way that will offer new forms of employment. The Church may, if requested or permitted, suggest ways of dealing with the problem, and assist with the charitable and social work of its parishes to serve the immediate needs of the families affected by the resulting changes.

At a European Union level, how do you think the Church can best contribute to the efforts of the European Community to move towards an ecologically sustainable and climate-neutral future, based on the recently issued EU Green Deal?

In the European Union the various ecclesiastical communities, including the Orthodox Churches, play an active role in the ecological initiatives taken by the Member States of the Union. This is due, among other things, to the initiatives developed by the Ecumenical

Patriarchate for the protection of the natural environment since the 1990s, which actively involved the Orthodox Church in this sacred cause. The recent Encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato 'Si* also highlighted the Roman Catholic Church's interest in the ecological problem. For this reason, the Churches were invited to participate in the formation of the EU Green Deal. The Church has many tools at its disposal to influence the behavior of European citizens in their ecological behavior, such as preaching, catechism, and various parish activities, and this should be developed as much as possible today. I think that for this purpose instructions and directions should be given by the leadership of the Church at the highest level, and the actions should be done in cooperation between all the Christians of every European country.

What has historically been the role of Christianity in the emergence of the environmental problem? Does Orthodoxy have any particular responsibility for the current situation on the planet in relation to the protection of the environment? Is there room for cooperation between Church and science?

You have raised a key issue. American historian Lynn White Jr. as early as the 1960s, had pointed out in a study published in the journal *Science* the historical responsibility of Christian theology for the emergence of the ecological problem. His arguments refer mainly to Christian theology, as it developed in the West, especially in modern times with the abuse (especially from the Calvinist Protestant tradition) of the biblical commandment: “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it,” which encouraged people to exploit as “rulers of nature” material creation - which, according to Max Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West. Orthodoxy does not seem to have played an active role in these developments. On the contrary, its entire culture (architecture, folklore, etc.) testifies to a special sensitivity in respect

for the natural environment. Nevertheless, its theology with the overemphasis on the importance of the soul at the expense of the importance of matter and the body can lead to an indifference to the natural environment and needs special attention at this point. Regarding the cooperation of Church and Science for the protection of the natural environment, I believe that, yes, this cooperation is imperative and possible, as proved by the relevant international symposia Religion and Science, organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Church now understands that it has a duty to protect the natural environment and this cannot be done without cooperation with science.

We know that the Eucharist and the ascetic tradition constitute the two main pillars of the life of the Church. How could they contribute to the sensitization of the modern fragmented human being aiming at the change of his way of life, such as e.g. the change of the production model, the reduction of consumption, etc.

The Eucharist and the ascetic tradition are the two most important things that the Orthodox Church can offer in dealing with the ecological problem. Both of these are foundations and special features of the Orthodox Church and contain modes of life, which are absolutely necessary to save the natural environment.

In the Eucharist the human being recognizes in the most formal way two things: a) that nature (expressed symbolically with bread and wine) is sacred and is destined to be united with God, that is, what is most important in our life and to be communed, that is, to be shared among people with love. And b) that man is not the “possessor” but the “steward” and “guardian” of nature, which he must “offer” to God with praise as “Thine own of Thine own.” On the other hand, the ascetic tradition aims to fight the greed, avarice and egocentrism of man, which lead to the reckless and excessive use (abuse) of natural resources, which characterizes our modern cul-

ture. Unfortunately, these two things, Eucharist and Ascesis, which are the foundations of the Church, as well as their consequences, are not promoted as much as they should by the Church itself in order to create an environmental ethos in modern man.

You have repeatedly written that what people need today is not a new moral proposition but a new ethos. Do you think that your proposal for man as a priest of creation is an adequate response on the part of the Church to address the environmental problem that so strongly threatens today the very survival of man and the planet? How should it be understood?

I stressed, indeed, and I emphasize that we need an environmental ethos. Ethos is different from ethics. Ethics is based on rules that people set in their behavior based on reason. It thus addresses the reason of man. But our relationship with the natural environment is not formed when our logic matures, but from the first moment we are born. From young children we acquire habits, which are cultivated by our family, school, etc. as ways of relationship and behavior, to which we become habituated without submitting them to our logic. From this age on, and in this way, our proper relationship with nature must be formed, we must learn to love it, to take care of it, to respect it. To arrive at this “ethos,” requires the development of a culture in which not only “reason” will be involved, but symbols, art in all its forms and generally the unconscious forms of our relationships with other people and nature (our habits). This is exactly what we lack in our effort to develop environmental awareness and behavior.

At this point the Church can play a key role through its worship. The Church receives us from young children and places us in a symbolic environment, in which our relationship with matter and nature as being sacred becomes habituated, with dimensions that transcend our logic and become spontaneously ways of relationship.

This is the deepest meaning of man as a “priest of creation.” The worship of the Church “habituates” us to the sacred character of natural creation and this “ethos” is more necessary to us than any ethics.

Climate Change and our Theological and Pastoral Responsibility Today: Reflections of a Bishop

METROPOLITAN IGNATIUS (GEORGAKOPOULOS) OF DEMETRIAS

Climate change is considered nowadays as the most urgent problem facing humanity. As a complex threat, it puts at risk not only a part of the planet but the entire environment, endangering the very survival of the human species and the natural world. Rooted in an extreme self-referent and narcissistic interpretation, that dominated after the Enlightenment, of the biblical narrative of the world's creation (*Genesis* 1-2), humanity has adopted a way of life that assumes a dominating role and position in the world. It was the major thinkers of the Enlightenment such as Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, but particularly René Descartes's "cogito ergo sum" which gradually disassociated humanity from the materiality of the world determining a worldview which presented the human being as dominating nature for the sake of its own pleasure. For centuries now, humanity has followed this path of utilitarian exploitation and overconsumption of natural resources, being indifferent to the preservation, protection, or survival of the wider universe.

It was only in 1967 that Lynn White Jr. clearly pointed out the historical responsibility of Christianity for the ecological problem,

thus bringing to the fore the spiritual and religious aspects of the issue against the economic and political parameters that dominated until then. Subsequently, many Christian churches and traditions in the West would make serious efforts to embrace their responsibility, cultivating, either through their institutions or through ecumenical organizations (e.g., the World Council of Churches, or the Conference of European Churches), the necessary initiatives to address this multi-faceted crisis. One could refer here to Pope Francis's recently issued Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 2016, as well as the specific committee of CEC dedicated to ecological crisis and future sustainability, the open letter of CEC on the topic "What future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values,"¹ to mention only few.

But how has the Orthodox Church reacted to this reality?

Under the guidance of the so-called "Green Patriarch," Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has for the past three decades taken a leading role at interdisciplinary and interreligious conferences (from Patmos 1995, Black Sea, 1997, Danube, 1999, to "Towards a Greener Attica," 2018) and initiatives (e.g. the establishment of September 1st as the Day for the Environment), seeking to highlight both the spiritual and religious aspects of the ecological crisis while stressing the need for a spiritual transformation of humanity and for a common treatment of these negative developments. In a recently published document by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, titled "For the Life of the World:

¹ Conference of European Churches. (2016). What future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values. Link: https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1GB2016_Doc15-Open-letter-Future-of-Europe.pdf

Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church,”² a quite promising as well as provocative document, it is clearly stated in relation to the present ecological crisis that:

None of us exists in isolation from the whole of humanity, or from the totality of creation. We are dependent creatures, creatures ever in communion, and hence we are also morally responsible not only for ourselves or for those whom we immediately influence or affect, but for the whole of the created order—the whole city of the cosmos, so to speak. In our own time, especially, we must understand that serving our neighbor and preserving the natural environment are intimately and inseparably connected. There is a close and indissoluble bond between our care of creation and our service to the body of Christ, just as there is between the economic conditions of the poor and the ecological conditions of the planet. Scientists tell us that those most egregiously harmed by the current ecological crisis will continue to be those who have the least. This means that the issue of climate change is also an issue of social welfare and social justice. The Church calls, therefore, upon the governments of the world to seek ways of advancing the environmental sciences, through education and state subventions for research, and to be willing to fund technologies that might serve to reverse the dire effects of carbon emissions, pollution, and all forms of environmental degradation” (par. 76).

This prophetic document clearly states that as long as the type of the *homo economicus* continues to dominate our anthropological imagination according to which the economic growth (in modern terms, neo-liberalism) itself can solve any problem and that the free

² Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. (2020). *For the life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*. Link: <https://www.goarch.org/en/social-ethos>

competitive markets are the best means by which individuals and modern societies achieve ever increasing wealth, the need for an alternative anthropological model based on a re-envisioning of Christian tradition is urgently required.

Evidently, for someone quite aware of these developments, one of the major achievements of EU policy nowadays can be clearly identified with the so-called “four freedoms” (the freedom of movement of goods, people, services and capital), which lay at the background of the free market economy. Without fully downgrading all its merits, the recent economic crisis facing the European project, the weaknesses of the central (is there really any?) European political and economic governance, as well the increasing refugee crisis and, closely related to all these, climate change, challenge in an unpredictable and unforeseen manner the very ideal of a peaceful Europe.

Unfortunately though, this discussion and developments have not been much followed by the major part of global Orthodoxy, especially in the context of the so-call traditional Eastern Europe and Balkan Orthodox countries, which by being entrapped in a totally different agenda, they sought to construct and secure their own particular (primarily cultural, national) identity over and against the developments in the West. This is also the case with Greece too, which as a country being for almost 500 years under the Ottoman yoke, has not been able to go through the great developments in Western history (Reformation, Anti-reformation Enlightenment etc.), remaining unfamiliar with the contemporary discussion and distanced from the European decision-making centers. The so-called “Babylonian captivity” (Georges Florovsky) to alien models of thinking and social organization, prevented both the Churches and their theology to creatively respond to the emerging new challenges that dominate our lives today. In spite of this hesitance on the part

of the Church, we, as bishops, are particularly obliged to undertake our responsibility and direct our flock towards a new way of life that would account for the salvation of the whole creation.

Climate change is not a reality that threatens a piece of land far away from our home. It is a reality that puts at risk our own villages and cities, here in Greece as well. It suffices to refer to the unspeakable disaster that took place in the region of Attica during the last years (floods in Mandra and wildfires in Mati and Kinetta, Attica, Greece) which caused the death of a considerable number of people (over than 100) in almost a few hours. Furthermore it has become customary and not the exception to not only hear about (during the winter or summer, if one can still discern any season!) but also primarily to experience exceptional weather, like long periods of time with high temperatures, winter storms, forest fires, floods, a situation unknown some decades before, which causes incalculable problems to the local environment, climate and economy. It goes without saying then that climate change as a child of globalization not only challenges but also affects in different ways the whole planet and something should be done to reduce its consequences.

Based on the rich tradition of our faith and practice, I am definitely sure that an alternative anthropological model is required, in other words a new *ethos*, a new way of being, different from the dominating lifestyle which prioritizes consumption and individual eudemonism as the basic task of our narcissistic Ego over solidarity, responsibility for the neighbor, all the living beings and nature. What is needed is not simply a new political program which attempts to find the balance between the goals to be achieved and the risks to be avoided for the sake of political correctness, but an ethic that will take seriously into account the need of human beings to deeply dive into their heart seeking the true meaning for the entire world. Without a meaning, a transcendent meaning to seek, hu-

manity is destined to die being entrapped in its own narcissism, as Cersei Lannister, the Queen of the iron throne (from the quite telling TV series “Game of Thrones”) who in the last episode remained blind in front of the coming total catastrophe.

Taking as our starting point the loving-communal-sacrificial ethos, manifested in the self-revelation of the Triune God in Christ, along with the personal mode of being that summarizes the soteriological proposal for the human being, the Orthodox Church and theology are called to propose a different model of life and social coexistence where the respect of personal freedom and difference, as well as the respect of the creation’s integrity, along with ethical responsibility to take action within this eon and not to wait until the eschata, will constitute a fundamental cultural condition. The anthropological ideal of personhood, primarily understood as *homo eucharisticus*, as it is expressed in the experience of the Church and witnessed throughout our ecclesiastical tradition and life constitutes, I believe, the most valuable gift that Orthodoxy can offer to the contemporary human being, the most powerful antidote against the prevailing *homo economicus*, without of course this proposal being the only or dominant proposal in the present secular public area. While considering its eschatological identity, the active and primarily philanthropic and “philocosmic” presence of the Church in the public sphere away from any favorable or privileged treatment due to its glorious historical role (a situation of which most of us, bishops and believers are aware), and respecting the conditions and rules of this area, will offer various guarantees for its seamless process in history, focusing not only on human pain relief, but also the interception of the various interconnected problems which threaten the very existence of the cosmos. Despite our frequent historical or practical deficiencies (to be admitted) that are evident here and there, we, as Orthodox, by virtue of a constructive re-

interpretation of the eco-theological and anthropological elements of our rich tradition could inspire a new eco-ethos, where every human being as a “priest of creation” and definitely not a possessor, will offer into God’s hands the whole of creation, humanity included, in order to become the New Creation in the Kingdom.

Following this alternative ethos, one cannot but undertake certain actions both in our home (country) and in our parishes, including: recycling of every single natural resource that is able to be recycled; elimination or at least considerable reduction of our waste (in Volos for instance we are all victims of an unthinkable waste incineration that pollutes the local environment...; use of clean and non-toxic materials (and certainly not plastic of any kind...) and food (the fasting tradition of our Church would be of considerable help here, along with organic techniques present in the simple life of a Greek village); use of alternative forms of energy and fuels (wing-turbines, renewable sources of energy – unfortunately many of us are still reluctant and are against them based on, so to speak, shadow purposes...); and many other practices. All this could boldly and gradually contribute to the necessary greening of our local environment with considerable impact on the regional climate as well. A “Green Church,” a term which might sound strange or even odd to the ears of our Orthodox fellows, should be considered perhaps as the only way to transform the world here and now. Insofar as the Word of God became flesh to save the world, I assume it is again necessary for His body, the Church, but also for each of us to incarnate his vision and word by undertaking specific green initiatives, as those described above, so as to serve the plan of God for the salvation of the planet. No matter how much money a coalition of countries (like the EU or the USA) could invest in a Green Deal, nothing will change if we, each of us, either believer or not, do not undertake one’s own individual responsibility to transform our local

community, whether a parish here in Volos, or a secular community in Paris.

Climate change is not something to deal with in a managerial way. As the ultimate evil of our eon, it should be clearly understood as an existential problem, the result of human beings' disobedience to God's commandment according to the understanding of *Genesis*. In this regard, even though God's creation was considered as a "very good" one, and the human being had freedom bestowed on him, the latter's abuse became the cause of disaster not only between human beings but also the source of evil in the created order. It is against this primordial evil, that we, as bishops, have the major responsibility to fight. This is our call and this would be our measure upon which we will be judged at the eschata, by the Lord of history, Jesus Christ. Are we ready then to sacrifice our life and luxury to save the planet and our neighbor? If not, we need to reconsider our Christian identity which is grounded in the ultimate sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God, for the sake of the entire world.

We live in a critical time, where radical action is required against our egocentric and consumerist culture that prevents us from finding a real meaning in our life. The history of our Church in its entirety was nothing more than an attempt to explain the nature and character of evil (today as the ecological evil), and its implications mainly through the lens of the divine-human relationship and the disorder caused to creation itself, and to offer a new vision in the light of *theosis* or deification which is the main goal of Christian life.

The Natural Environment, Theology and Human Being

METROPOLITAN PAVLOS (PAPALEXIOU) OF SERVIA AND KOZANI

The growing interest of Orthodox Theology in the environment, what some call “ecothology,” reflects a fundamental belief and the experience of the Church, long before it became the field of contemporary theological engagement. Unfortunately, however, as Christian society distanced itself from the living ecclesiastical experience and consequently from theology, theological concern for the environment was marginalized while its theological expression was diminished or obscured. As a result, the current ecological crisis emerges with extremely threatening consequences for the whole planet, awakening to a certain extent the consciousness of the world community towards ecological issues and renewing the theological problematic in these issues.

Thus, in recent years, global summits on the environment, attended by Presidents and PMs’ of States and Governments, have been held at the highest level, without, however, great success, despite scientific conferences and meetings having been organized, an abundant, relevant literature having been created and various projects having been prepared to address the problem. For its part, the United Nations established June 5 of each year as a day dedicated to the environment. In this context, the Orthodox Church has also

shown highly valued and creative activity. The initiatives of His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew are well known and recognized worldwide. The establishment of September 1 as a day of prayers for the protection, among other things, from the catastrophes that human beings have caused to the environment, expresses the Orthodox sensitivity to the problem. Competent theological studies, conferences, and the general theological reflection on the environment, far from being exhausted in an ecological activism, have contributed the much-needed Orthodox reflection on the problem, the treatment of which is an inescapable necessity.

However, in the lively debate that ensued, especially in academia, Christianity was often targeted as the ideological alibi of a strictly hierarchical world, in which anthropocentrism was first cultivated and then the domination and subjugation of the natural world by humanity. This reality requires the constant promotion of the Orthodox teaching of creation and its evaluation from an ecological, this time, point of view.

Indeed, among the ideas and beliefs that Christianity introduced as something radically new to the late Greco-Roman world, was the belief in *creatio ex nihilo*. Our world, the whole universe is not self-existent, nor the necessary outflow of a primary substance. Its existence is not imposed by any logic or other necessity, but is a product of God's freedom and creative love. The world could not exist. It exists, however, as creation by God and from its very beginning it refers to its origin. The richness of the flora and fauna, the complexity and the perfection of its structure and function, not only reveal the wisdom of its Creator, "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (*Ps. 19,1*).), but also values creation itself as a product of God's creative energy and love. This is the depth of the meaning of the "very good" creation (*Gen. 1:31*).

A first “eco-theological” assessment of the above forces us to observe that creation is not a simple episode of human history, it does not have a merely instrumental character, nor is it merely the field of exploitation to ensure human well-being. It is an outcome of the love of the Trinitarian God which manifests “the revelation of the sons of God” (*Rom.* 8,19), pointing out the catalytic importance of human intervention for its fate.

Although the human being’s position in God’s creation is a position of superiority – only the human being has been created in the image of God, constituting thus the crown of creation – it is not a position of authoritarian imposition and abuse. The position of human being in the creation of God as steward, to “work it and take care of it” (*Gen.* 2,15), as priest, highlights its privileged role in offering all creation to its Creator. That is why the human being is characterized, by the patristic literature, as a “bridge” (between created and uncreated) or “microcosm.” The human being’s intervention between the Trinitarian God and creation, makes it co-responsible for the process and fate of all creation. Consequently, the treatment of the natural world by Christian theology goes beyond the concept and practice of simple respect, a behavior that is a necessary and capable condition for human survival. Orthodox Christian thought gives the world an “autonomous,” so to speak, value as a creation of God (Christian eco-centrism) and recognizes its role, both in the history of salvation and in the reality of the *eschata*.

The interference of the Fall in the divine plan as a product of an abusive understanding of human freedom, disrupts, among other things, the harmonious relations between humanity and the natural environment. The morbid anthropocentrism of the post-lapsarian condition enrages material creation and leads it to revolt against human beings, thus reminding it, of its own rebellion against God. This reality, a common place in biblical and patristic thought, is el-

requently expressed by Saint Symeon the New Theologian (922-1022) in the following words: “the beasts and all the animals of the earth, stripped of this first sight of glory despised him, and were all harassed directly against human being.”¹ The hostility and rivalry of irrational creation against humanity is nothing more than the alignment of nature with a framework of operation, which human being itself has set with its fall, a framework in opposition to the divine plan. A painful and unacceptable framework even for the irrational creation itself, since “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (*Rom.* 8,22), awaiting the final restoration in Christ. That is why Christology foresees the restoration of the whole creation through incarnation, to the extent that the new man in Christ, beyond all selfishness and utilitarianism, is called to eucharistically offer it to God as the “blessed Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The progressive secularization of Christian society, which is inevitably reflected in nature, having as its conventional starting point the Industrial Revolution, has come to culmination in the last two centuries. This reality is the most eloquent denunciation of our fallen condition. By replacing the *Homo Sapiens* with *Homo Scientificus* and *Homo Technologicus* the enormous development of science and technology in the twentieth century, has sacrificed on the altar of uncontrolled economic growth and human eudemonism, the survival of the planet preferring an ecological-cosmic death² to the

¹ *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 122, p. 190.

² Cf. Pierre Samuel, *Ecologie: detente ou cycle infernal*, 1973.

enforcement of moderation and balance, asceticism and restraint.³ The society of late modernity or postmodernism appears to place ecological issues low on its agenda, despite the anxious appeals of experts, insisting on a disastrous alienation, the dangers of which are becoming increasingly threatening.

Shepherding, by the grace of God, a particularly ecologically burdened diocese, we are constantly confronted with the acute reflection, sometimes even the contradiction, between the Orthodox theology of creation and, the environmental problems brought about by the existing reality. More specifically, our diocese, as the most important energy source for the production of electricity in the country, has faced for decades, acute environmental problems, simultaneously with the economic growth guaranteed throughout this period by the electricity production, the jobs it offered and the its general contribution to the development of this province. Without the slightest inclination to go into specialized issues, let us note that “burning lignite for electricity production has a devastating effect on the environment and public health. It consumes huge amounts of water, emits pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, microparticles, heavy metals, large amounts of carbon dioxide.”⁴ According to this report, sulfur dioxide alone affects the acidity of lakes and rivers, through the acid rain created by its presence in the air, polluting the water cycle. Its effects on human health include respiratory difficulties, respiratory diseases, and the further burden of existing cardiovascular diseases. After all, the significant

³ For the alternative ecological value of Orthodox monasticism, see Anestis Kesselopoulos, *Man and natural environment*, Athens, 1992, p. 165 ff.

⁴ WWF Greece. Fossil fuels. Link: <https://www.wwf.gr/sustainable-economy/clean-energy/lignite> (last accessed, September 17, 2020).

effects of electricity production on the environment of Western Macedonia have been repeatedly denounced, despite the sometimes significant efforts, both by the state and the company, to reduce them.

However, the already announced shutdown of the factory that produces electricity through lignite has, as expected, provoked a very sharp reaction in the local community, due to its understandable socio-economic consequences. The goal “by 2023 to have withdrawn all lignite-fired thermal power plants currently in operation and its complete disconnection from the domestic power system by 2028,”⁵ announces a period of general recession, high unemployment and important social problems in our region. Consequently, the fear of tomorrow and the reactions of the social body are perfectly justified.

Reflecting on the consequences of such a development, as they are presented in the public debate, we prioritize the gloomy explosion of unemployment in an area, which already has very high unemployment rates.⁶ Such a development mobilizes a whole chain of social and economic consequences such as impoverishment, the sharpening of regional disparities, the destruction of a huge amount of capital invested in the region for electricity production, the despecialization of a number of experts that have been created for decades and are internationally competitive, and the internal and external migration, which is already a reality. In addition to these, the wider negative effects should be added, such as the worsening of

⁵ L. Vatikiotis, *The effects of the transition to the post-lignite era. The case of small and medium companies in the Region of Western Macedonia*, Institute of Small Companies, Research Papers, No. 11, 2020, p. 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

energy dependence, the increase of energy prices for heating in an area with admittedly very cold winters, etc.⁷ The proposals for the future, as presented in various projects⁸ and the corresponding government announcements,⁹ are still going through the evaluation process, with the main objections being the possibility they provide for not paid work, the timeframes for achieving the development announcements, etc.

As pastors, we receive in the most painful way this mental and spiritual upheaval of our flock and we are deeply concerned about the sufficiency of our pastoral action, in order to contribute, as much as possible, to the relief of people from the coming difficulties. The Church, far from being an idealistic reality of the Platonic type, is interested also for the material components of the spiritual path of the believer and its effects on life in Christ. Always having in mind the evangelical and patristic teaching of social justice, which derives from the fundamental biblical teaching of the image of God in every human being - and not only the Christian, we cannot stay indifferent to social problems, especially in modern people. Paraphrasing the saying of the well-known Christian philosopher of the Russian Diaspora Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), to observe that the care and interest in our own bread is a material issue, but the interest in the bread of our neighbor is a spiritual problem.

⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸ Cf. WWF Greece. (2016, July). *Roadmap for the Transition of the Western Macedonia Region to a post-lignite era*, available at <https://bit.ly/2KBEQt3> (last accessed November 29, 2020).

⁹ Cf. SDAM Steering Committee. (December 7, 2020). Public consultation on the master plan for lignite phase-out. Link: <http://www.opengov.gr/minenv/?p=11202>

With these thoughts occupying us in the daily life of our ecclesiastical ministry, we make every effort to support the afflicted. A social grocery store, a pharmacy and a tuition center have been operating in our province for a long time, while the ecclesiastical charity, both at the parish level and at the diocese level, is constantly practiced with the fear of God. Of course, we need to intensify our efforts in this direction in view of the expected escalation of difficulties in our region, but at the same time, we need the appropriate readiness to deal with mental, spiritual and family problems, which usually arise, following the various social, professional and financial problems. At the same time, the basic priority of our ecclesiastical pastorate is - and should be - the information and pedagogy of our pastor, with the aim of deeply understanding the value of creation as a gift of the Trinitarian God, its protection, its contribution to the spiritual integration of human being and its reference to its Creator.

The pastoral care and presence of the Church in social problems, organically inseparable from the work of salvation and christification of human beings, is a key pillar of its mission in the world. It is not a luxury, nor a result of pity. It has no moralistic or legalistic character, nor should it contribute to individual or collective self-promotion, but to reflect the love and intimacy of every needy person in Christ as His image, with humility and fear of God. Nevertheless, charity, in all its diversity, does not, nor should it, exhaust the pastoral care of the Church in social problems. The empirically certified in this case link, between the protection of creation as a creation of God and the social and pastoral problems that result from de-lignification, cannot be cured by charity alone.

To the extent that the Church embraces the whole of human life and theology is a signpost to salvation, the necessity of a total intervention of Orthodox theology in the structure and function of this world which stands out. A theology that must have a word to

contribute to politics, economics, epistemology and bioethics, social justice and ecology. But such a theology, if not forgotten, is certainly in the making. Of course, this effort must constantly overcome the danger of transforming theology, from an expression of God's experience and taste into an ideology, to avoid the illusion that this world, subject to the post-lapsarian condition, can become the Kingdom of God. But it must always be present, to build the whole grid of human life and to demand, if not proposals for a solution, certainly proposals for a substantial contribution to human problems, which its spiritual and material entity allows us to distinguish in the spiritual and material, only in terms of methodology. Until then, however, we must deal with the contradictions, such as the need to protect the environment on the one hand, and any polluting business activities that threaten it on the other. To walk not stochastically or fatally, but energetically and prayerfully, seeking to inoculate with the grace of the Holy Spirit every aspect and every corner of this world.

The Orthodox Christian Worldview and the Ecological Problem

BISHOP IGNATIJE (MIDIĆ) OF POZAREVAC AND BRANICEVO

The contamination of the natural environment and the irreversible destruction of nature has become the mode of living for modern man. Consequences of such behavior are obviously tragic for human life and subsistence of the whole Earth. What can be done by the Orthodox Church in order to stem this problem if what has previously been lost cannot be retrieved? In order to answer this question, we need to find the causes of ecological disaster. If we want to treat the disease, we need to make an accurate diagnosis of the illness. Later we will see which curatives can be offered through the Orthodox tradition and its way of existence as a treatment for the severely damaged and stricken natural environment.

THE CAUSES OF THE ECOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Many centuries ago, the Western European man began to regard himself as an individual endowed with intellect who is placed as an independent subject in relation to the environment. Modern man observes nature as an object of research and makes it an object of usage in order to improve the quality of his daily life. Based on this, science was developed in the Western European world.

Science uses an analytical method of exploring nature and its observations and conclusions have facilitated the construction of machines that exploit nature in order to improve people's living standards. From the invention and construction of the steam engine, airplane, telegraph, telephone, as well as other inventions, through to the discovery of electricity and modern technology, science and its fruits, which can be called by one name "technique and technology," has made rapid progress so that new machines and tools for the production and exploitation of nature appear every day. What is still characteristic of modern science, in addition to all that has been listed, is that a large number of scientists and ordinary people who believe in it, present science for the most part to the detriment of the Christian religion. Most scientists use all scientific achievements to show that God is not the creator of the world, but that the Earth and all life on it are eternal and original and without any influence from God or any supernatural forces. According to them, the presence of life and natural species are accidental events without any final purpose. In recent times, a scientist views himself as the absolute master of nature and life and as someone on whom everything depends. This leads to the fact that modern man believes that he will, by his own forces and science, have absolute control over nature and life and that he himself will finally create paradise on Earth. What, however, is the real consequence of the development of science and technology and our understanding of this?

By virtue of modern techniques and technology, the production of everything in the world that comes from natural resources is progressing so fast, coupled with the rapid exploitation of nature that not enough time is left to renew natural resources. Since the desires of man as an individual with regard to the quality of his individual life are insatiable, requirements are imposed daily for ever-

increasing production of all his needs. Modern man has become an uncontrolled consumer of everything and that is why he demands increasing production. In order to more easily satisfy his individual desires, a man unites in unions and forms state communities which aim to ensure the happiness and comfortable life of the human being as an individual.

The exploitation of nature in order to satisfy the growing consumer desires of modern man in this way leaves so many deep wounds on nature that it can absolutely no longer be renewed in certain areas. Hence, there is general race and struggle, not only between states and nations, but also between individuals within one state, to appropriate as many as possible of the Earth's natural resources. As a result, conflicts and wars between states and nations for the control of natural resources are becoming more frequent. Wars again lead to an arms race and, accordingly, the production and use of nuclear energy for the production of nuclear weapons, such energy definitely being the greatest danger, potentially leading to the destruction of all life on Earth.

At the same time, industrial production not only changes, exploits and consumes nature, but also leaves behind so much toxic waste and garbage and pollution which permanently corrodes and destroys nature. Special mention should be made of nuclear waste, as well as medical waste, which since there is nowhere to dispose of it, it represents a potential danger by poisoning and destroying every living thing on Earth.

The consequences of pollution and destruction of nature are visible not only in nature in the form of climate change and major natural disasters, but also when it comes to human beings.

As an example, we mention the situation from our local environment. In the field of our diocese there have been two major pollutants of nature for decades. These are the factories for obtaining

and processing of iron and steel, which is located in the city of Smederevo, which has about 150,000 inhabitants, as well as the huge thermal power plant Kostolac and Drmno for the production of electricity twenty kilometers away. These two giant air polluters, with so much waste, are becoming not only a great threat to the environment and human lives, which in some days of high humidity and low atmospheric pressure are unable to reach clean air, but also drastically affect the microclimate change in the area. In the last two decades, the winter period has absolutely no snow (which was not the case before), while precipitations are so sudden and abundant and when there should be none, that they cause large-scale floods. There are also sudden appearances of stormy winds of such destructive power that people, even the oldest ones, absolutely do not remember that something like this happened in the past on these terrains. This most likely awakened people's awareness that something serious was happening to our environment, and that is the reason why in recent years they have been so resolutely against the construction of so-called mini hydroelectric power plants on nearby rivers.

The same is the case in other parts of Serbia, where associations for environmental protection are appearing more and more often. We personally work very closely with some of them, especially in the field of education of the widest possible layer of the population, all with the aim of protecting and restoring the endangered environment.

Pollution of nature inevitably reflects on the poisoning of the human body. That is the reason why new and more serious diseases appear, against which man is no longer able to fight despite the development of science and technology. This indicates that man is an integral part of nature and shares the same destiny with it. More precisely, man's relation to nature is his relation to his own body

and life. All this is evident in the modern world, and if something does not change, the consequences will be tragic and deadly, both for the whole of nature and for the human race. But how to change this when we have come to a vicious circle of death with this way of life, from which there seems to be no way out?

Reducing consumption would inevitably lead to a reduction in production. The latter would inevitably be accompanied by a reduction in employment and thus would bring millions of people to the brink of subsistence. This would, however, lead to bloody revolutions and wars between nations. That is why politicians in many countries are reluctant to hear about the environmental problem, they even ignore it, because a possible reduction of industrial production in order to preserve the environment would inevitably lead to a decrease in the income of citizens and would bring into question the status and position of politicians. How then to prevent an ecological catastrophe? There is little chance that the transition to the production of energy from renewable sources, such as the sun, wind, etc., will permanently solve the environmental problem. It seems to us that it is necessary to change a person's perception of another person and nature, in order to radically change the current way of life and, in order to make individuals protectors and guardians of nature. In what way can the Orthodox Church, based on its experience and view of the world and man, contribute to change the current mentality of man so that he turns from a consumer into a protector of nature, and thus preserves planet Earth and life on it?

THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF MAN AND NATURE

The Orthodox Church and its way of life, as well as its view of the true existence of the world and man, are based on the eschatological vision of the world and man. The world and man are the work of God's love. God created them out of nothing with a special

purpose. The last reality that God intended for man and the world is, on the basis of Revelation, the union of all people and nature with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and through cooperation of the Holy Spirit and their eternal life (cf. *1 Cor.* 15,23-28; *Matt.* 25, 31; *Luc.* 6, 20-23). However, if man wants this too, it is because God does not use violence against man. That vision is embodied in the Liturgy, i.e. in the Mystery of the Eucharist, which is primarily the gathering of people and nature around Christ and union with Him and among themselves. The liturgy is not served for one person, nor can it be served for one person. It is the common work of many people and God. At the same time, nature in its entirety is consecrated at the Liturgy in the form of consecration of bread, wine, water, etc. What does the Liturgy show us with regard to the true existence of man and nature, to their way of life, as well as to their mutual relationship?

A man seen from an eschatological and thus also from a liturgical perspective is not an individual, he is not self-sufficient, but a being of community. More precisely, man, unlike all other created beings, was created to be a person. However, man is a person only in the community of freedom and love of God, other men and nature. The experience of love for another person indicates the following facts which refer to a person and which constitute a person.

At first, when you love someone freely, that being becomes special and unique to you, i.e. becomes a person. Those we do not love, for us they do not even exist.

Secondly, the being you love becomes so precious to you that you cannot imagine your existence without it. This indicates that a man is not a man for himself, he cannot exist as a person if he is alone, an individual, but only in communion with another.

Third, when the other loves you, then you also become a unique person; you have the impression that you are the most important

person in the world, i.e. that you are like God on whom the existence of someone who loves you depends.

Fourth, the personal, loving communion of one person with another at the same time makes the world around us exist and unique. In a personal community with another being, the nature that surrounds them becomes precious and unrepeatable. It also becomes as a person. That is why a man who loves and who is loved at the same time loves the whole world. So, man is a person only when he is in communion of freedom and love with another man.¹ This statement introduces us to a different ontology, to the ontology of togetherness, of relations.

RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Modern man sees himself as a unique personal being separate from others. He experiences freedom as freedom from the other, not as freedom for the other. For modern man, the other is the enemy (hell) and not the source of existence. The liturgy, on the other hand, shows the opposite: a man is a person only if he expresses his freedom as love for another man, as freedom for another. This is because the Liturgy, as a communion of many people united by one man, i.e. the bishop, is the revelation of the divine mode of existence to which man is called to look up to, because he is created as “similar” to God. On the basis of Christ’s revelation of God, as well as on the teaching of the Church Fathers, God is one but is also a communion of three persons: Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Every of these persons is an eternal and unique being, but only in a community of freedom with another person.

¹ More about this, see our study: “Теологија и еколошки проблем,” у *Саборност* (2019), p. 21-28.

The Father as a person is the principle of divinity and the cause of the Holy Trinity and he is what he is – The Father, because freely, out of love, gives birth to the Son and from Whom proceeds the Spirit, i.e. he is in eternal communion with the Son and the Spirit. Both the Son and the Spirit are unique persons because they are in eternal communion of freedom with God the Father and among themselves. At the same time, the divine nature exists eternally on the basis of the personal communion of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Personality realized as a communion is the basis (hypostasis) of the existence of the divine nature. The liturgical communion of man with other people reflects the way of God's existence and is, therefore, of ontological significance for man. The union of personal freedom with another person is his true existence.

The very community of people among themselves and with the rest of nature apart from God, i.e. apart from Christ and the Liturgy, cannot guarantee eternal existence to people and nature. There are the following reasons for this: on the basis of the Revelation recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament man is a created being. He was created out of nothing like the rest of nature. Humans are mortal beings because they were created out of nothing like other beings. Therefore, humans cannot exist alone, based on their nature. Man is not God. However, he was created to be God, i.e. he was created to overcome death and live eternally. However, a person cannot achieve this alone on the basis of his nature, nor only on the basis of community with another person (e.g. reproduction). Man can become God only in communion with God. That is why, in addition to the communion of man with another man and nature, a communion with God is also needed. Because God is the only source of life.

However, a human as a created and limited being, cannot achieve communion with God alone if God does not do that first.

God is invisible, unknowable, immeasurable for man and man cannot be united with Him. He especially could not do this after the original sin and fall. This is the whole importance of the descent of the Son of God into the world and his incarnation. The Son of God became the man Jesus Christ in order to unite, in his own person, man with God the Father and to give every human the opportunity to be united with God. So, in order for man as an icon of God to become similar to God, i.e. in order to gain life everlasting, it is necessary not only to have communion with another man, but also with God in Christ. This communion can be realized only in the Church, in the liturgical communion. In it, God is revealed through man, i.e. in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Liturgy, God and man are inseparable.

On the other hand, man is a part of nature. As a bodily being, his body is in direct connection with the rest of nature. The existence of man directly depends on the existence of the whole of nature. Nature is the source of human life. As we have already said, other created nature also participates in the Liturgy. The liturgy cannot be served if there are no gifts of nature in it: bread, wine, water, oil, etc. The central event of the Orthodox liturgy is the consecration of nature (gifts), with the invocation of the Holy Spirit on it. On the basis of liturgical vision and experience, nature was created *ex nihilo* and was created for eternity, that is, with the goal of everlasting existence. In order to live, it is necessary to be in a relationship with God, i.e. it needs to be united with God who is the only immortal and source of life. However, nature cannot achieve that union with God alone, without man. Man is the only mediator between nature and God, and he is the one who brings or does not bring nature to God. Precisely because of that union of nature with God, God created man at the beginning of history and at the end of creation, similar to himself, “in his icon and likeness.” He created

him free and gave him power over nature. Man's power over nature does not mean that man was created to produce and destroy nature as we do today, but he is called to be a mediator between the whole of nature and God, i.e. to be a priest in nature and its savior from death (cf. *Rom. 8, 19-21*) – to offer nature and unite it with God, so that both man and nature would live eternally.

This is shown and confirmed to us in Christ. Through his entire way of life, and especially through his baptismal sacrifice, Christ offered human nature, and through it, other created nature, to God the Father. In this way, Christ became a priest in nature who offered created nature to God the Father. In response to this sacrificial gift of Christ, God the Father has given man, as well as the rest of created nature in Christ, eternal life. This is shown in the event of the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. At the same time, Jesus Christ became a priest and a mediator in the unification of all people who want this, and of the whole nature with God the Father. By his incarnation, Christ became the only true priest and mediator between world and God and enabled every man to be united with God and to exist eternally, both man and nature. Therefore, man is called to offer to God, himself and his nature, if he freely wishes, and to unite with Christ in order that Christ may bring and unite him with God the Father. Man himself, apart from Christ, does not represent a priest and cannot be united with God. This can only be done through Christ in the Liturgy, that is, in the Church. This is indicated by the Liturgy and its doings. Gifts of nature at the Liturgy: bread, wine, water, etc. which are brought by the faithful people, are handed over to the bishop who is the icon of Christ, so that he may offer them to God the Father. By the invocation of the Holy Spirit on all the faithful and on the offered gifts, the people and the gifts of nature become united with Christ and God the Father inseparably and without confusion and in this way become deified. Nature

and people in the liturgical offering, iconically depict the last reality of the world, i.e. the Kingdom of God in which they overcome death by the activity of the Holy Spirit, as was done in the case of Christ's resurrection from the dead. This indicates the final purpose and fulfillment of entire nature, which is to be offered to God through Christ and by means of Holy Spirit so that at the end of history the world would overcome death and become the eternal Cosmic Liturgy, that is, the Kingdom of God. So, nature was not created to be spent and lost, but to live eternally – and that in communion with God in Christ and as Christ. However, nature cannot achieve this goal alone, without man. Man is the only being who, as a priest, is able to bring nature to God. At the same time, the salvation of nature from death by the human being is at the same time the salvation of the human as a human, as a person. Man is different from nature, i.e. from all other living beings, but he is not independent, that is, separated from it in his existence. The difference between man and nature is that man is free, that he is a person. However, the personality of the human being does not exist without created nature, as well as nature does not exist without the personality of the human. In what way can modern man change the ontology of individualism into the ontology of relations and communion in order that both man and the world exist liturgically?

THE WAY OF REALIZATION OF RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY IN THE CHURCH AND DAILY LIFE

Based on liturgical experience, the opportunity for a person to change the ontology of individualism and egoism into existence as a communion, is Baptism. Baptism is a precondition for someone to become a member of the liturgical community. What is the essence of the event of Baptism? Baptism is the symbolic death of the old man and the birth of a new one. This, in other words, means that in

order for a person to become a being of the communion, it is necessary to give up his will, to put aside his egoism and to manifest freedom as love for another man and nature in the Liturgy. In this way man transcends death and is resurrected in Christ. A person can do that, only if he wants, if he expresses his freedom constructively as a will to collect and unite one with another, and not to decompose and destroy. For death is nothing but the separation of man from another man, from God, as well as the division of the unique nature into parts until their disappearance.

This is, in essence, the very ethos of Orthodox-Christian asceticism. The central element of monastic vows and monastic life is a person's renunciation of his will in order to fulfill the will of another, i.e. the will of God. The whole ascetic life has as its aim, man being free, which means liberation from slavery to his nature and passions, in order to express his freedom as love for another man and for God. Without this liberation, there is no love: everything is just interest and egoism, i.e. self-love. The insistence that human free will is the key to the realization of the relational ontology has vital importance for the existence of both man and nature. In contrast to the modern way of schooling and education, which is dominated by the development and improvement of human intellectual abilities as an individual, and thus its orientation towards a rational approach to life, it is necessary to educate primarily the human will. Will is a fundamental element for the realization of a personal communion with another without which, as we have seen, there is no existence for man. For sake of this communion, he does not so much need to develop his intellectual abilities, but to free himself from slavery to nature and its laws, as well as from slavery to his passions in order to manifest a free will as love for God, other men and nature. The will of man is a crucial element, not only for the solution of interpersonal relations, and certainly if we want the ap-

plication of rational solutions with regard to the problems in society,² but also for overcoming the ecological crisis. We are witness today to the many appeals of scientists that man must change his attitude towards nature if both he and the Earth want to survive, which, although logical, do not find approval with people. Only by renouncing our own will, or more precisely, self-will, egoism, and individualism, is one able to change consumer mentality. This is indicated by the ascetic experience in Christianity. The key element in Orthodox Christian asceticism is a person's giving up of his will in order to fulfill the will of another that is God. More precisely, it is personal voluntary giving up of egoism and individualism and the realization of a free communion with God and another man. From that community, as we have already seen, human love for the rest of nature as a creation of God inevitably arises. Education, therefore, should pay attention to the ontology of relationships and communion, and thus to the education of the human will, because the will is a fundamental element which is a base for fulfillment of a person's communion with another person and with God, i.e. a community of love for the other and for God. Without freedom there is no love and without love for the other and for God there is no existence. This truth should be first taught within the family and then to be continued in schools and all other social institutions. All Churches and Christian communities have to pay attention to it.

² The human will as a key element of life and existence is indicated not only by the Church Fathers and ascetics, but also by the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky in his works. Dostoevsky clearly shows how great utopia is to base life on a logical and a rational approach to it if there is human egoism and self-will.

CONCLUSION

The relational ontology on which Christian Orthodox theology insists, since it is based on the teaching about God – the Trinity and on practical liturgical and ascetic life, can also be accepted by science. There are enough elements in modern science for that, such as Einstein’s theory of relativity and Quantum theory.³ By means of education of the human will, which is a key element of the Christian ontology, a person may turn from an individual into a person, i.e. a being of communion and thus to change his consumer mentality with regard to another person and nature. All this is necessary if we want to save ourselves and thus nature from death and final destruction.

³ See J. Zizioulas, “Patristic Anthropology and Modern World,” *Саборност* (2019), p. 1-20 (in Serbian).

The Climate Crisis and the Need for Orthodox Stewardship

THEODOTA NANTSOU

Environmental ethics is not a new branch of Orthodox Christian thinking. Care for the world, understood as God's creation, has deep roots in the patristic, liturgical and ascetic tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Ethics and theology however, does not automatically translate into practice. Humanity, now facing the cataclysmic impacts of the climate crisis and the enormous effects of the loss of natural ecosystems and biodiversity, has made the role of the Church in actively restoring a harmonious and future-looking interaction with our environment absolutely essential.

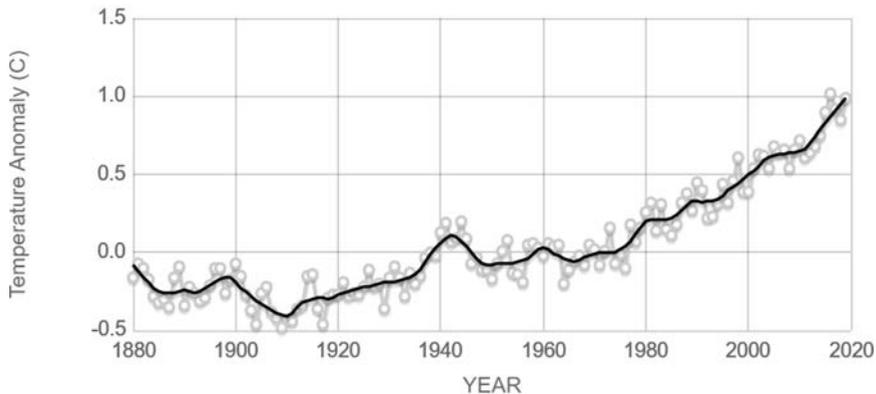
A GLOBAL CHALLENGE FOR SURVIVAL

The climate crisis is already nearing the life threatening threshold of 1.5° - 2°C rise of the planet's mean temperature. Reaching this point is beyond scientific doubt considered as the start of an unstoppable collapse of climate and ecosystems. According to the atmospheric data recorded by the scientific observatories, "the planet's average surface temperature has risen about 2.05 degrees Fahrenheit (1.14 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere. Most of the warming occurred in the past 40 years, with the six warmest years on record

taking place since 2014.”¹ The effects of this human-induced disastrous change of the climate are already felt in the world: loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise and longer, more intense heat waves which have resulted in catastrophic floods, uncontrollable forest mega-fires, and threats to biodiversity.

As climate change, a planetary crisis caused by human-induced emissions of specific gases to the atmosphere, rises to disastrous levels, room for action keeps shrinking, creating the urgency for effective measures to increase dramatically.

Graph: Global mean temperature increase since 1880

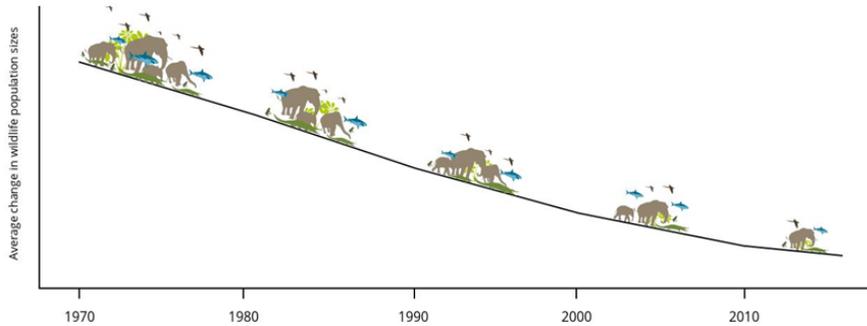


Source: climate.nasa.gov

Data source: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS)

¹ NASA. *Global climate change – Vital signs of the planet. Facts.* <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/> (last accessed, November 5, 2020).

At the same time, another crisis is hitting our planet. The loss of biodiversity and natural resources is progressing at alarming rates. According to the 2020 Living Planet Report,² the population sizes of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles have seen an alarming average drop of 68% since 1970.



Source: Living Planet Report 2020

The year 2021 is a milestone for concerted action to reverse this trend towards a planetary crisis of historic proportions and spark optimism for a brighter future for humanity as a caring steward of our living planet.

The international summits on climate and biodiversity, which were initially planned for 2020, but were eventually postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the agreement of a truly ground-

² R.E.A., Almond, M. Grooten and T. Petersen, (eds.), *Living Planet Report 2020 - Bending the curve of biodiversity loss* (WWF, 2020).

breaking and forward-looking EU Green Deal³ are the greatest challenges. At the same time, an agreement is about to be reached on Europe's Just Transition Mechanism,⁴ which will offer much needed financial help to regions and communities, moving away from the polluting and climate destructive dependence on coal. It is important that this fund rules out any possibility of financing the large, wealthy polluters, like the fossil gas industry, and that it aims for inclusive and fair rebuilding of strong and resilient societies.

The European Union's Green Deal, a package of legislative and policy initiatives that serve the high aim of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent, means its targets and measures need to become the umbrella guide for the coordination of actions towards zero-emissions. The EU Green Deal covers a broad spectrum of sectors, primarily related to energy (directives on renewable energy and energy efficiency), industry (circular economy action plan), healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (Farm-to Fork Strategy), nature protection (EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and EU Forest Strategy),⁵ just transition to vibrant economies free from fossil fuels (Just Transition Fund), and climate change (European Climate Law).

³ European Commission. (2019, December 11). *The European Green Deal sets out how to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people's health and quality of life, caring for nature, and leaving no one behind*. <https://bit.ly/3mBoHoX> (last accessed November 5, 2020).

⁴ European Commission. *The Just Transition Mechanism: making sure no one is left behind*. <https://bit.ly/2J4fflK> (last accessed November 7, 2020)

⁵ European Commission. (2019, December 11). *The European Green Deal*. Communication from the Commission. COM/2019/640 final

In our Balkan neighbourhood, many countries are currently in a period of phasing out coal – a challenge that needs to attract the attention of the local Orthodox Churches. The divestment of local and national economies from coal, which has for many decades served as the main source of electric energy, leaves tens of thousands of workers in limbo and deeply concerned about the future of their jobs. For instance, the transition to the post-lignite era of Kozani, Florina and Megalopoli in Greece, but also in other Balkan countries, primarily Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina, is a testbed of pastoral care by the Church for communities going through difficult times.

THE ROLE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

In an increasingly interconnected world which faces an endless series of crises transcending national borders, how important can the role of Christianity be in the cause for biodiversity protection and the mitigation of climate change?

Thanks to the leadership of the current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and his predecessor Dimitrios (1973-1991), the Orthodox Church has articulated a robust eco-theological narrative, which places the urgency of environmental protection at the center of her agenda.⁶ The numerous initiatives, pastoral messages and acts of deep care for nature conservation and the urgency of addressing climate change have been particularly effective in raising environmental awareness across the globe.

⁶ John Chryssavgis, *On Earth As In Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

In those parts of the world where Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion, a recent research by the Pew Research Institute⁷ has shown that the deep concern and voice of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the urgency of addressing the crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss is having a clear and positive impact. Orthodox Christians are widely in favour of stricter rules for the conservation of nature and the protection of the environment in general.

Particularly in communities living in poverty, which also suffer the impacts of poor air quality and pollution, such as the coal regions in the Balkans, the role of the Church is of utmost importance. Caring for those persons and families that suffer and even becoming the voice for a just transition to a future of clean energy, nature-based solutions to climate change and vibrant local economies where no-one is left behind, can be game-changing.

Climate change is not only one of the foremost threats to the world as we know it. It is a matter of deep social and economic injustice. As Patriarch Bartholomew has eloquently said, “[w]e cannot separate our concern for human dignity, human rights or social justice from concern for ecological protection, preservation and sustainability. These concerns are forged together, comprising an intertwining spiral that can either descend or ascend.”⁸

⁷ Pew Research Center (2017, November 8). Orthodox Christianity in the 21st century. Polling and analysis.

⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (2015, November 4). *Creation care and ecological justice: Reflections by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Speech at the Oxford Union*. <https://bit.ly/3p7yuk6> (last accessed November 5, 2020).

WWF has actively helped communities of the world's major faiths to turn into action their deep understanding of humanity's caring role for the world.

With the support of science and research data, the deeply ethical relationship of Orthodox Christianity with can become a force for change, a powerful voice for a living planet, healthy societies and just transition to climate neutrality.

The numerous examples of really inspiring environmental care initiatives undertaken by Orthodox communities, collectively or individually, are only a minor indication of the power of the Church to become the greatly needed vocal leader for environmental justice and genuine care for the regions going through a phase of economic transition to the post-coal era and climate neutrality.

GOOD EXAMPLES NEED TO BECOME THE NEW ORTHODOX NORMALITY

The active environmental concern expressed by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has evolved into an integral part of Orthodox Church life.

The conversion of certain monastic communities into models of sustainability, organic farming in monasteries and the incorporation of environmental messages in religious education are shining examples of the compatibility of modern ecological practice with everyday Orthodox life. At the same time, a fast growing number of Orthodox community leaders have voiced their concern over local pollution, the rapidly escalating climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity and natural resources, and humanity's wasteful lifestyles.

In Crete, the holy convent of Chrysopigi is a pioneer in organic farming and zero-waste resource management. Another monastery, in Halkidiki, the holy convent of the Annunciation in Ormylia, worked together with WWF in the 90's and developed pioneering

ecological agriculture practices in the farmlands. In Thessaly, the holy monastery of St John the Forerunner conserves and cultivates a rich variety of natural indigenous seeds, thus preserving agrobiodiversity. Such examples of caring for nature and biodiversity need to become the norm for all Christians.

Many monasteries and Orthodox communities in Greece and other parts of Europe have installed renewable energy systems in order to cover their electricity needs through clean power sources. Currently, the Holy Community of Mount Athos is planning its transition to clean energy, via a major programme for the installation of solar panels in all monasteries. In Romania, the elders at the monastery of St John Cassian decided that the energy needs of their community should be covered by renewable energy. For the past fifteen years, their monastery has been powered entirely by wind.⁹ Such examples of caring for the climate of our planet and the quality of air need to become the norm for all Christians.

In the early 90s monasteries from the Holy Mount Athos worked with WWF in establishing an ecologically sustainable system for the management and protection of the biodiverse forests cared for by their monastic communities.¹⁰ In the secular world, the Church of Greece has oftentimes been criticised for treating its forest property strictly as an economic asset for real estate development, instead of pursuing their legal protection and conservation. The good examples of forest protection need to become the norm for all Orthodox communities and the Church.

⁹ Robert Van Waarden, (2013, August 26). Romanian monks turn to wind energy. The European Wind Energy Association.

¹⁰ UNESCO / World Heritage Convention. (1994). Mount Athos (Greece). State of conservation. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3111> (last accessed November 5, 2020).

In 2009, a priest from the industrial Greek city of Oinofyta, father Ioannis Economides (cf. *infra*), was awarded the prestigious prize of the Academy of Athens for his exceptional and unrelenting crusade to stop the heavy industrial pollution of Asopos River.¹¹ For decades, factories had been dumping unprocessed toxic waste into the river, which ended up in the taps and homes of Father Ioannis's parishioners contaminating their lives with high levels of hexavalent chromium, a known carcinogenic chemical. The campaign led by Father Ioannis and chemist Thanasis Panteloglou, who unfortunately died of cancer in 2014, resulted in important victories for the quality of water, first time inspections by the authorities, and landmark court decisions that have considerably improved environmental justice in Greece. It is a reasonable expectation that a priest will lead the social demand for the protection of the environment and the health of the communities he shepherds.

TOWARDS A SOCIAL ETHOS OF LOVE AND CARE FOR THE WORLD

In a recent theological document (March 2020) on the Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, a powerful analysis addresses the root causes of the

current environmental crisis, for instance—anthropogenic climate change, toxic pollution of water sources and soils around the world, ubiquitous damage to the entire ecosystem by microplastics

¹¹ Deborah Kyvrikosaios, (2007, December 5). River runs purple, contaminates Greek town. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/environment-greece-chromium6-dc-idUSLo817394820071205> (last accessed November 5, 2020).

and other contaminants, deforestation, soil erosion, the rapid decline of biological diversity.”¹²

In its robust analysis, this groundbreaking theological Orthodox theological treatise states that poverty, civil injustice and the environmental crisis are “proof of how impoverished the human moral imagination can make itself in servitude to ideology,” remarking that “[w]hole schools of economics arose in the twentieth century at the service of such inequality, arguing that it is a necessary concomitant of any functioning economy.” At the same time, “our often heedless consumption of natural resources and our wanton use of fossil fuels have induced increasingly catastrophic processes of climate change and global warming.”

Environmental and climate scientists and activists are no more alone in declaring that climate change is not only a matter of environmental protection but

also an issue of social welfare and social justice. The Church calls, therefore, upon the governments of the world to seek ways of advancing the environmental sciences, through education and state subventions for research, and to be willing to fund technologies that might serve to reverse the dire effects of carbon emissions, pollution, and all forms of environmental degradation.

Especially in communities suffering from the impacts of the climate crisis and nature loss but also in regions going through the period of economic transition from fossil fuels to economies of zero emissions, the support of the Church is particularly important. The

¹² *For the life of the world. Toward a social ethos of the Orthodox Church.* Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. (2020). <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos#> (last accessed November 6, 2020). Cf. Appendix 1 in this volume.

contribution of local Church leaders to a socially just transition, as well as the promotion of the best available ecological practices for the mitigation of the impact on societies can be a catalyst in the protection of human societies and nature.

Sincere discussions about the moral dimensions of climate change and bridging with scientific research and evidence in identifying the best available solutions increases the effectiveness of a common response to this existential crisis. Acknowledging that there are no easy approaches to our world's pressing environmental problems, there is a role of paramount importance for the Church to actively engage communities and leaders in a solutions-oriented dialogue and become a champion for urgent climate action

Creation as Gift: A Sketch for an Orthodox Green Theology

NIKOLAOS ASPROULIS

Long before the Paris Agreement (2015) or the recent EU Green Deal (2019) certain Christian Churches, and theologians began to reflect seriously on the impact of the environmental problems on the present and future of God's creation. Despite, however, the increasing theological interest in ecological matters, a systematic account of a *green theology* is still missing especially from an Eastern Orthodox standpoint. The aim of this brief text is just to allude to certain doctrinal parameters that would substantiate and further facilitate the theological and pastoral work and witness of the Orthodox Church leaders, parish priests and lay people.

CREATIO EX NIHILO:

TAKING OUR PLANET SERIOUSLY INTO ACCOUNT

To start the discussion about the doctrinal resources of a green theology, one needs to boldly examine the origins of creation from the standpoint of the absolute dialectic between uncreated and created, along with a radical understanding of "nothing" (nihil), emphasizing the freedom of God as the ultimate cause of creation which ensures an ontological dualism. One need to stresses here the role that human beings can play in relation to the salvation of crea-

tion, taking into serious consideration man's position as "microcosm" (Maximus the Confessor) as well as his accountability and liturgical vocation as "priest of creation." In this regard one needs to point out the novelty of the Christian vision against the various prevailing theories in the early patristic era.

On the one side Gnosticism held that the world is "penetrated by evil." An escapist attitude from this "evil" world was boldly considered then a necessary condition for salvation. On the other side the Platonist view, according to which the created world is penetrated by divine presence, sustained the inherent concept in various eco-activist trends of creation as self-sufficient. While the concept of a created world is highlighted perhaps for the first time in Plato's Demiurge (*Timaeus*), his account of God refers to a decorator and not a creator *ex nihilo* in an absolute sense.

The most basic question ultimately revolves around the proper understanding of the concept of creation itself, which must be examined dialectically along with its beginning. Christian theology was thus forced to innovate. "Creation as *ktisis* is a notion encountered for the first time...with the Apostle Paul, and it clearly presupposes an absolutely ontological beginning."¹ By using the term *ktisis* rather than *demiourgia*, Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon emphasizes the ontologically absolute character of the beginning of creation, which the Church Fathers ontologically interpreted as creation "from (absolute) nothing." In this context, absolute nothingness signifies the lack of any metaphysical kinship between God and creation at the level of existence.

¹ Cf. John Zizioulas, "Created and Uncreated: The Existential Significance of Chalcedonian Christology," in *Communion and Otherness* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 250–285, here at 253.

By emphasizing *creatio ex nihilo* as the very foundation of any eco-theology, the world cannot be regarded as eternal. If the world was eternal it would not need to be created; and if it was not created from nothing then the world was created from something that has some other existence. This is clearly a reversal of the ancient view and leads to the conclusion that “existence is the fruit of freedom,”² since the self-referentiality of being, as perceived in ancient thought, is now abolished. According again to Zizioulas the doctrine of creation out of nothing has clear ecological implications: “The world does not belong to us and we are not ‘inhabitants and masters’ of nature...but rather ‘stewards and managers.’”³

The fact that the world is not eternal means that there is also the possibility that it would return to nothing and cannot live eternally on its own right. One of the negative prospects of the Fall is the ultimate activation of “the limitations and potential dangers inherent in creaturehood, if creation is left to itself,”⁴ inasmuch as nothingness, ultimately death, continuously permeates and penetrates the world. If creation is a gift, originated from the absolute and creative will of God, then it by no means possesses any natural or other means to guarantee eternal survival. This is an uncontested reality nowadays, when climate crisis threatens the very sustainability and the future of the planet itself. It is sufficient here to refer to the expanding global warming and the radical consequences of the

² Ibid., 255–256

³ See, John Chryssavgis & Nikolaos Asproulis (eds.), *Priests of Creation: John Zizioulas on Discerning an Ecological Ethos* (T&T Clark, 2021 forthcoming) ch. 1.

⁴ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), p. 102.

climate change for biodiversity and the survival of all creatures, including human beings, in order to realize that our world is, today as never before, under the yoke of death.

CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE PLANET:
MATERIALITY MATTERS!

So what should be done? In more theological terms “how did God want the world to survive?” This question is not just theoretical but relates to the core of the Gospel message and the Christian identity. Various answers proposed over time to this question.

On the one hand there was the notion of the immortality of the soul. If anything offers creation the possibility of existing in a natural way, it inevitably also leads to an obligatory immortality. On the other hand equally unacceptable is a related proposition based on “moral” or “juridical” foundations supposing that created being can improve itself by practicing or obeying natural or divine law. This is not the case though: “No, death is not conquered like that. The only thing conquered is preoccupation with the problem of death”⁵ Zizioulas clearly states.

Another way of thinking is required here. According again to Zizioulas, theology needs to allude to Chalcedonian Christology. In this context, special attention should be given to the patristic idea of “hypostatic union” which prioritizes the person over the two natures of Christ. In Maximus the Confessor’s view, to overcome death, a relationship is necessary between the created and the uncreated. It is the human being who must undertake this role. However, the Fall foiled this divinely ordained task, necessitating change

⁵ “Created and Uncreated,” 258.

of the divine plan. What was required now was for the Logos to become human.

The Chalcedonian Definition, and particularly the clause “without confusion” and “without division,” describes the relationship between God and humanity in the person of Christ. The latter highlights the necessity of no separation between created and uncreated, since there must be also real communion at the ontological level in order to avoid both the self-referentiality of the creation and death. The former guarantees the freedom, otherness and the dignity of the two realities; otherwise, the relationship would not be free. The two concepts mediated in Christ, in whom communion and otherness coincide. Christ’s resurrection offers the whole of creation a victory over death and salvation.

*THE PRIEST OF CREATION:
MAN HAS A ROLE TO PLAY*

Patristic tradition therefore envisions man as the link, the bond or the “bridge” between God and creation. Against the prevailing understanding of the *imago Dei* as chiefly referring to the human mind (*ratio*), the Greek Fathers represent a different perception in light of freedom, according to which the latter should be considered as “the ability to affirm or deny the very existence of something ... to either destroy creation or affirm its existence.”⁶ The current ecological crisis clearly highlights the relevance of such an understanding of human freedom. To be clear, contemporary currents of theology credit Darwinism (not always without reservations) and modern Quantum physics for highlighting the inherent interconnection or rather *ontological* interdependence between humanity and the

⁶ Chryssavgis & Asproulis (eds.), *Priests of Creation*, ch. 3.

whole planet. The human being is just an animal, albeit an “*autexousion* animal” “with a difference of degree, but not of kind.”⁷ It is due to the freedom bestowed to humanity that man possesses the capacity to “transcend the limitations of nature to the point of denying nature itself or anything given.”⁸ It is exactly here that man’s role as the priest of creation emerges. Creation in itself, devoid of any natural means of salvation, needs man as a priest to refer it back to its Creator. It is in the Eucharist that humanity undertakes this priestly role acting in the place of God himself, by offering the creation in its entirety to God the Father, so as to gain eternal life. In this vein, man becomes the “priest of creation,” the one called to treat the world not only with respect but also “with creativity so that its parts may form a whole and this whole may transcend its boundaries by being brought into relation with God.”⁹ This renders human being an indispensable component for creation in contrast with certain modern ecological views that devalue man’s role in saving nature.

ANTHROPOMONISM VS. ANTHROPOCENTRISM:

MAN STILL MATTERS FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD!

The real challenge that lays in the heart of the current ecological crisis is the way one responds to the following basic question: “Who am I”? Climate crisis cannot be addressed without a new understanding of human identity. A dated self-sufficient and self-referent perception of human being that does not need to relate to its surrounding setting in order to exist (a *substantialist* ontological

⁷ Ibid., see chapters 3, 9.

⁸ Ibid., cf. ch. 7 (lecture III).

⁹ Ibid., ch. 3.

view), leads to a sharp dichotomy between man and the world. The present critical condition that we all face, is a result of such an understanding of human being who defines its relation to creation in terms of superiority, possession and domination.

In contrast, if one defines human being in terms of relationship (a *personalist* ontological view), in which a reference to, or rather a relation with a Thou, and It, occupies a central role, then it is easier to realize the close (ontological) dependence of human being on the other (humans, nature, or God). This relational understanding of humanity can serve as the background of a different ecological *ethos* that can be simply expressed as follows: *Every single part of creation matters*. In this vein, humanity should be seen through the lens of its priestly role, meaning that one is responsible to offer the whole creation to God for its salvation. This is not a mere moral task, but a way of life that takes seriously into account creation in all its aspects as an ontological component of the *imago Dei*. This was the understanding of the Church Fathers (e.g. Gregory Palamas), when they argued that the *imago Dei* is not complete without the whole creation being a constitutive part of it.

The distinction then between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism clearly fits to the following typology. In the case of a substantialist ontology man is defined over against the rest of the world, while in a personalist ontological point of view man is understood only as part of a network of relations. If we try to get rid of such an anthropocentric view, the result would be to both downplay the *responsibility* of humanity not only in the destruction but also in the salvation of creation, and assign to creation a power to be saved on its own, something that equates to paganism, a view that cannot be acceptable by a Christian.

CLOSING REMARKS

Today, it is not enough for humanity simply to preserve, as a steward or *oikonomos* the environment. Climate change has radically put in jeopardy the very existence of the entire cosmos. Man is called to act as priest of creation, as *homo eucharisticus*, in order to contribute to the eschatological incorruptibility of the God's creation. At the end of time, we must offer in return the precious gift offered to us by God not as a polluted and destroyed planet but as the Eucharistic Gifts of the body of Christ in order to live forever. While "ecology is ... a matter of our *esse*," the offering of creation through humankind to God also makes it a matter of "our *bene esse*."¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., ch. 9.

Bulgarian Orthodox Theology and the Climate Challenges

SVETO RIBOLOFF

According to the Modern Bulgarian Constitution the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) is a traditional religious community in modern Bulgaria. It is not a state religion but enjoys some legislative privileges in the country. About 75% of Bulgarian citizens declare themselves Orthodox Christians; about 10% are Muslims and there are about 1-2% Protestant and Catholic Christians. Nevertheless, the active Orthodox believers are a relatively small community. This fact diminishes the influence of BOC in the different social and political processes that Bulgarian society faces.

As to the ecological challenges of South-Eastern Europe, one can easily realize that BOC never had an active role in Bulgarian society. In fact, the only official statement released by the BOC during the last century on the ecological challenges of the Modern World is in the context of the ecological problems of the Black Sea region. It is a public speech given by the previous Bulgarian Patriarch and

Metropolitan of Sofia Maxim¹ released on September 26, 1997, in Varna.² His Beatitude says:

We should hand [the created realm] on to the generations that come after us [...] enhanced and with great capacity for supporting life [...] in our community the harmful exploitation of nature, the creation of God, is no longer tolerated. It is incumbent on us to use the created world which God has entrusted to us in a beneficial way and not to exploit it mercilessly. We should hand it on to the generations that come after us, not as a wasteland, but enhanced and with a greater capacity for supporting life.³

In modern Bulgaria there are several theological schools. Most of them are closely connected to the Orthodox Christian tradition (there are also two Protestant seminaries). There are faculties of Orthodox Theology at the Universities of Sofia and Veliko Tynovo, one Ecclesiastical Academy in Plovdiv/Philipoupolis, two small Departments of Theology at the Humanitarian Faculties in the Universities of Shumen and Plovdiv/Philipoupolis. There are also two Orthodox Seminaries that are part of the high school education system. They are situated in Sofia and Plovdiv/Philipoupolis. The

¹ Patriarch Maxim (Minkov, October 29, 1914 – November 6, 2012) was the leader of the BOC from 1971 until his death.

² Varna is a big port on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. It is an important economic center of North-East Bulgaria. In the past it was a cosmopolitan city with a Greek, Turkish, Jewish, Armenian, German, and Bulgarian population. Until now Varna is an important international city but over the last few decades it has been much more influenced by its new Russian and Ukrainian settlers.

³ Fr. W. Krueger, *Transfiguring the World: Orthodox Patriarchs and Hierarchs Articulate a Theology of Creation*, (Santa Rosa, CA 2008), p. 68.

Protestant schools are situated in Sofia and have a predominantly Pentecostal and Baptist theological background. They have recently developed distance learning education programs and can teach online all over the country.

In the Bulgarian schools nowadays, there are no Religion or Catechesis classes. There is a plan by the Ministry of Education for the introduction of such classes starting the next school year as an optional course in Religion for the primary schools. According to the program, there will be three options: Orthodoxy, Islam and Ethics. In all these classes Ecology will not be a central topic. Ecological topics are always related to the Biblical Creation account. In the Ecclesiastical Seminaries Ecology is totally missing. It is true that their curricula are part of the common humanitarian high school education and the theological courses have not been elaborated as basic educational topics. The ecclesiastical commission that inspects the curricula of these schools has never recommended such topics as part of the program.

The University-based Theological Schools in Bulgaria for long time had an old and very scholastic theological curriculum. In such a curriculum the only space for Ecology was the Biblical account of Creation and the topic of the Ancestral Sin. They were respectively parts of the course of Old Testament and Dogmatic theology. Some more issues were touched upon in the Christian Ethics course. During the last 10 years the Faculties of Theology at the Universities of Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo have made a decisive step forward. They reformed their curricula and introduced new curricula that go beyond the old scholastic model of theological education. It opened space for the Ecological themes not only in Biblical Studies but also in the courses of Christian Ethics, Dogmatic theology and some optional courses in Systematics as a whole. I can especially point out the specific theological approach of Kostadin Nushev who devel-

oped a number of problems related to Ecology in his works on St Maximus the Confessor and integrated them into the common courses of Christian Ethics. He interprets being as a gift in a cosmological context and in an anthropological context. It is a Eucharistic understanding of the being.⁴ The human ethos is grounded in a personal responsibility for the divine gift. The synergy theme is also situated in this Eucharistic context. A similar trend can be found in the courses of Marian Stoyadinov in Dogmatic Theology which is related to the discussion of the Ancestral Sin and Divine Grace. The ecological topic is developed in a more traditional way in the Old Testament course of Dimitar Popmarinov.

At the Faculty of Theology in Sofia such a thematic is part of a few courses in the new curriculum. Traditionally, in the general course on the Old Testament the problem is represented in the context of the Biblical account of Creation. A parallel optional 30-hour course, "Ecology in the Context of Biblical Theology," was proposed in 2016 by Emil Traychev, professor of The New Testament. In the systematic theology stream the optional courses of Ivan Christov on St Maximus the Confessor and the Dionysian Tradition also touch upon the Ecological thematic. He analyses the concept of synergy, natural contemplation and *theosis*. In contrast to Svilen Toutekov, he analyses these subjects in a metaphysical and more philosophical way and does not take into consideration their Eucharistic dimensions.

In the Bulgarian Protestant seminaries, the Ecological thematic is situated only in the context of the Biblical account of creation and, in this respect, continues the tradition established in the Or-

⁴ See K. Nushev, *Antropolgiata na sv. Maxim Izpovednik i razvitiето na pravoslavното npravstveno bogoslovie*, (Sofia 2013).

thodox theological schools. The Protestant students even use publications of the Orthodox biblical scholars in this domain from the 80s and 90s of the 20th century.

As a whole the system of Theological education in Bulgaria does not share an active interest in the Ecological thematic. It is a relatively weak topic in Bulgarian theology. The perspectives for developing such a thematic are not very good. Maybe the only open space for developing these kinds of courses is in the systematic theology stream which has been increasingly interested in the monastic experience and theology of creation. If our collegium is able to integrate such a thematic into a broader ecological context, which is now at the center of very intensive political interest, it would be very useful for promoting an Orthodox vision on ecology. Unfortunately, there are very powerful “Anti-Ecologists” voices in Bulgarian society combined with some extreme conservative and Nationalistic views. It is strange but they represent their views on Ecology as being *par excellence* Christian and traditional. Up until this moment the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria has not made any official statement on this topic that allows for further and deeper discussion.

Certainly, the BOC has to do more in Bulgarian society because of the new challenges of the third decade of the 21st century. Bulgarian hierarchy needs to activate missionary programs in the problematic regions. For instance, until 2030 the Cool Power Plants, according to the EU Green Deal, have to be closed and many people in the region of North Thrace in Bulgaria will stay unemployed. Over the last few years, a new problem has appeared with the Waste Incineration Plants in cities like Sofia, Rousse and Pernik which have started polluting the earth during the winter. The health conditions in Sofia, particularly, deteriorated significantly during the last two winters. NGOs started independent researches because of the inactivity of state bodies that throws a shadow on relationships of some

state servants with the big business bosses. It appears that a significant part of the garbage in those plants comes from Italy. Lately protests in Sofia and also in other big cities have also been related to the topic in question. It is a widespread rumor in Bulgarian society that these Waste Incineration Plants work in collaboration with companies run by Italian crooks.⁵ Unfortunately, on its highest-level BOC keeps silent on this problem, perhaps because of the close relationships between a few bishops and the PM B. Borissov.⁶

With the last developments in Bulgaria since last year, it is obvious that the interest in ecological problematic will be much more active and that it will involve more hierarchs and theologians in such a discourse. The independent media and civil organizations already supply free space for discussions on climate challenges. Perhaps some of the most active priests from bishoprics of the BOC like Sofia, Varna and Rousse are already involved in this discussion

⁵ See Dimitar Stoyanov, "Trafikanti na otpadatsi ot Italia dostavyat bokluk za Kovatshki," in <https://bivol.bg/kovachki-trash.html> (last accessed September 20, 2020).

⁶ "Mitropolit Nikolay s rech v cherkva podkrepya Boyko Borissov", in <https://news.bg/politics/mitropolit-nikolay-s-rech-v-cherkva-podkrepya-politikata-na-borisov.html> (last accessed September 20, 2020)

A Contemporary View of Creation

THYMIO PAPAYANNIS

THE RELIGIOUS VIEW

In the Orthodox Christianity's view of the World, everything – including humankind– was created by a divine power, with immense wisdom. This power emanates from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which were personified in the Holy Trinity. Planet Earth was designed by the Creator as the habitat for humanity, with appropriate conditions that allowed humans to survive, to multiply and to evolve (Cf. *Genesis*). They were granted with intellectual capacities as well as freedom that encouraged leaps in many sectors and facilitated what was considered as rapid progress in letters, philosophy, business, and arts. Unfortunately, moral considerations were often neglected in the use of political and military power, which created a striking imbalance and remains at the root of our many problems.

Humans through the ages have focused on the analysis of spiritual matters, with religions playing a decisive role in determining the fate of nations and individuals. In spite of these diligent and consistent efforts, humanity has not managed to show our planet the vitally significant protective care stipulated in the Bible and the patristic teachings as stewardship of Creation. This influence has been decreasing in the 21st century, yet it is still a factor to be con-

sidered especially in threats that concern the entire planet and involve major populations.

Humanity treated the natural world, including indigenous people, in a hubristic and careless manner, ignoring or refusing to accept that it is part of the Divine Creation, therefore refuting its essential sanctity. For a lengthy period, this approach resulted in the emergence of environmental, social, and political problems. During the 19th and 20th centuries, however, humanity acquired the knowledge and the means for large scale interventions that started to modify radically basic parameters of the Creation. Fuelled by uncontrolled investments and various forms of globalisation, these large scale interventions focused on economic benefits, while ignoring negative and destructive aspects that were changing the face of Planet Earth, through urbanisation and destruction of natural areas, construction of mega canals and dams, airports and harbours, highways and industrial zones.

The establishment of organisations, such as the United Nations system and the European Union, has fostered international cooperation for the good of the entire planet. Treaties and agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and water and the European Union's Green Deal and environmental legislation have indeed made a difference. However, they have not yet managed to reverse the trend towards loss of nature,¹ climate stability,² peaceful co-existence and sustainable human activities.

¹ R. E. A. Almond, M. Grooten & T. Petersen (eds.), *Living Planet Report 2020 - Bending the curve of biodiversity loss*, (WWF 2020).

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2018). Global warming of 1.5°C. Special report. Link: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

CLIMATE CHANGE

In our days, climate change is proving to be the main threat to humanity. In spite of lengthy debates at an international official scale, as well as scientific disagreements, its impacts are already visible, clearly documented and cannot be disputed. The ice cover of the poles is melting rapidly, leading to sea level rise and opening new marine corridors in pristine parts of our planet. Freak climatic events are becoming more frequent causing human losses and severe economic damages. Oceans are warming, threatening habitats, species, and livelihoods. The survival of certain wildlife species has become precarious. De-forestation rates are increasing as freshwater availability is being reduced in other parts of the world leading to desertification and famine, which is some of the strongest motives for immigration.

Despite such strong signals, the response of the international community has been up to now slow and uncoordinated, resulting from the actions of powerful economic lobbies, and the negative policies of some of the major countries, led until currently by the United States and not only. At the global level, the situation matures at a glacial pace. The unfortunate result has been an inability to control effectively the rise of temperature at a moderate level, while uncertainty persists. The worlds' major religions and the Christian churches have played a marginal role in the debate, although climate change is modifying radically a key parameter of the Creation, which is the conservation of the natural environment, and is menacing the wellbeing and the survival of species, including eventually the human race.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Less than a year ago, a major global health issue emerged, the virus COVID-19, which spread rapidly throughout the world causing

massive loss of human life, near collapse of many national health systems, social unrest in most countries and endless economic repercussions.³ Efforts to coordinate responses at an international level through the UN system and the World Health Organisation, as well as regional cooperation instruments, such as the European Union, have not yet managed to strengthen effectively the required global collaboration. They were undermined by opinionated national leaders, conflicting scientific views, and ignorance, despite positive reaction and cooperation on large parts of societies. The second wave of the virus during the autumn of 2020 is leading to necessary unpopular measures, which exacerbated social unrest in many countries. It appears that the various vaccines and other appropriate medication under development may curb the virus attack during the next year but will not fully arrest it. We should be ready to face it for the long run.

An issue that currently dominates scientific debate is in which ways environmental degradation and the loss of natural ecosystems triggers pandemics, such as COVID-19.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL IMPACTS

Unless major catastrophes occur, human beings on Planet Earth will be able eventually to improve the necessary health facilities, as well as the related administrative structures so that the COVID-19 virus is relegated to a minor role. Of course, many scientific problems remain to be solved; especially immunisation questions. Social aspects of the virus attack remain to be considered and resolved. The major one is the impacts of the loss of life on families and on

³ WWF (2020). *COVID-19: Urgent call to protect people and nature*. Link: <https://bit.ly/3auOMiL>

the economies. The conflicts created by the measures taken by governments in limiting the damage done must be addressed and defused, so that social peace and normal democratic processes can be re-established.

In this momentous effort, the traditional faiths of each region could play a positive role. During the recent decades some of the major faiths have shown a growing interest in environmental matters and have issued guidance to their followers. In South-eastern Europe for example, the Christian Orthodox faith has been seriously involved in environmental issues guided by the initiatives of H.A.H. the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. He could bring together the Orthodox churches of the region in working for a contemporary view of the Creation, a view that would proclaim that its essential parameters are inextricably attached to the human race, which must respect and manage them for the benefit of all living beings and has no right to abolish or to modify them radically. According to this principle, climate change is undeniable and must be reversed. Similarly, the resulting extinction of species must be arrested, and balance restored. The millenary traditions of monastic communities – especially on asceticism– could provide invaluable guidance.⁴ Millenary traditions of monastic communities might provide useful lessons that could moderate the excessive consumption that seems to guide contemporary lifestyles and apply sensitive practices of sustainability.

⁴ Th. Papayannis, and Hieromonk E. Simonopetrites *Natural space and monasticism. The preservation of the Byzantine tradition on Mount Athos*, (Goulandri-Horn Foundation: Athens, 1994).

Such a progressive position would allow the faiths that adopt it a legitimacy to intervene on social debates and to assist societies that are facing critical environmental problems.

An approach based on the respect of Creation could be expanded to the entire area of SEE and to other faiths. It could be the inspiration of a new net-work based on spiritual principles and social equity concerns. It would also assist the Eastern Orthodox Church to avoid conflicting positions concerning health and environmental matters and their social repercussions.

“Rebirth from above” as a Condition for the Solution of Climate Change

ZVEZDAN KALMAR

WHY POLLUTION AND WHY DESTRUCTION OF GOD’S CREATION

Pollution and destruction of the environment and danger for both the health and life of human beings is one of the biggest threats to civilization today. This situation is the product of a long process of industrialization caused by a massive attempt by humans to provide sustenance for the needs of all Humans as it proceeds from the philosophical and different ideological statements and proclamations of scientists, industrialists, politicians, poets, and ideologists of the last almost three centuries.

Despite promises from industry and science that they will provide fulfillment of our needs, offer a better life and security for all Human beings, such promises have failed and today we are witness to unheard of divisions between the rich and the poor, global destruction of God’s Creation (“Nature” is just part of God’s Creation), extinction of species of animals and plants on an unprecedented scale and at an unheard of rate, and rising levels of poverty despite the rapid march of triumphant science.

Looking from the stand point of continuity of biblical history and history of recent centuries and decades we can say that promises of a solution to all the material needs of Humans thorough tech-

nology are actually a renewed attempt by humans to construct the tower of Babel with which they would reach and subdue the heavens to their own will. In this sense, this rebellion was and today is, an attempt by Humans to subdue the created World to their will and to their plans.

Such plans are based on the idea that science should become the absolute instance of truth and regulator of life and in the end even “generator of life” which has led to the situation where scientific technological control over the planet has become “religion” with its “Religious” promises, especially since the rationalist turnaround in the 16th century that constantly promised that with more inventions, better and more overarching automatization, better and more voluminous consumption of resources and their transformation into the final products, somehow by the “miracle” of the “blind eye of market” all the needs of people would be fulfilled and Humans would no longer need God as the provider of their needs.

We are living in complex and demanding times. As always in History, humans have always thought that their times are the worst, that *Morals* of their times are at their worst ever and that never before have Humans fallen so deep into sin. Despite such feelings, the Bible is more than clear that: “There is nothing new under the Sun.”¹ Despite such a clear description of the fact that it has always been bad to live in the world broken by Human sin and that it was always challenging, the fact remains that there has never been such wide scale destruction of nature, large number of the poor and unimaginable division of rich and poor.

The dramatic situation our civilization is faced with, is reflected in multiple negative phenomena that are intrinsically interrelated,

¹ Ecclesiastes 1,9.

sharing the same origin or coming from the same source. That does mean that solving the drama that is evolving around and in us, should essentially focus on the same point or the same problem. The problem is only that this problem is not some theoretical puzzle, it is specifically a problem of essential importance to all humans, both those who are suffering the most from it but also for those who are in a position to do good and to provide relief or even solutions for the hundreds of millions suffering from poverty, malnutrition, pollution, climate change, exploitation and, lack of freedom.

CAUSES AND HOW TO FIND THE SOLUTION

The causes of inequality are at the same time causes of massive destruction of the environment. With the looming advancement of technologies, one may wonder how is it even possible that such a statement occurs? Did not scientific and industrial revolutions in previous centuries and decades promise that poverty would be erased, all the needs of humans would be fulfilled, energy production would be on such a scale that every human had access to the precious energy while medical science would be able to cure all diseases?

In recent decades, awareness has developed regarding the link between massive industrialization and pollution, evident on an unprecedented scale in human history. This has led to countries and international institutions (mostly established by sovereign countries based on the belief that humans can and should solve all the economic, social, environmental and other problems through rational and rationally predictable legal – technological – economical interventions and unifications) to start global processes with the goal of describing (understanding) and identifying sources and consequences of the main global problems.

Names and content of covenants formulated and accepted by those international institutions (such as The United Nations, The European Union, The United Nations body for climate change, other multilateral financial and development institutions like The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund etc.) and member countries, have changed and problems have been defined (or are in the process of being defined), have resulted in systems for solutions being established, their depth increased in scope but, despite this as we now see, some of the main economic, environmental and social problems are still unfortunately growing.

While trying to describe the enormous global destruction of “nature,” extinction of God given species of animals, plants,² destruction of the climate in the form of anthropogenic runaway climate change, global pollution of oceans and soils, Humans more and more have increased the narrative of the potential of further technological development as the only solution for technologically caused ongoing destruction.

Technology as such is not a silver bullet and will not solve the problem. Only in tandem with moral rebirth, societal, legal and economic restructuring, will the vision of combating climate change, environmental pollution on a global scale while eradicating poverty, providing universal access to clean, affordable energy (including Food as Energy), access to clean and potable water for all, become reality, in Europe and the Western Balkans.

² As recent report show up to one million plant and animal species face extinction, many within decades, because of human activities, says the most comprehensive report yet on the state of global ecosystems, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01448-4> (last accessed December 1, 2020).

Such change will not be possible if the present system of planning and leading the economy from top to bottom, from corporate centers of power to the “objectified” citizens providing endless accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, remains intact.

Even though most people (globally and nationally, in all and every nation) who are trapped in the daily battles for provision of basic income necessary for living, do not question *the causes of inequality*, there is growing awareness of the facts supported by growing evidence of different researches that the biggest winners in the global economy are those at the top of society.

Oxfam research has revealed that over the last 25 years, the top 1% have gained more income than the bottom 50% put together.³ This means that in essence Humans have established economic mechanisms that only actually favor limited layers of society (limited number of countries if we look globally) while more than 90% of Human beings are actually subordinated to such a system without the prospect of ever achieving benefits and blessings that could be provided if justly shared. The world’s 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the planet’s population, reveals a new report from Oxfam today ahead of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.⁴

Money as representative of value (and wealth) generated through economic activity of Global Humanity shows that Humans are doing extremely well in producing but as we have already shown

³ OXFAM (2017, January). An economy for the 99%. Briefing paper. Link: <https://bit.ly/2Kw2OGc> (last accessed November 20, 2020).

⁴ OXFAM international (2020, January 20). World’s billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people [press release]. Link: <https://bit.ly/34gazak> (last accessed in November 21, 2020).

very poorly in sharing what is produced. Globally there is the so called physical “narrow money” (bank notes, coins, and money deposited in savings or checking accounts), the total being somewhere around \$36.8 trillion. If we look at so called “broad money,” which isn’t just physical money and includes any money held in easily accessible accounts, the number is about \$90.4 trillion.⁵ This means that there is enough physical money to give about 12500 US\$ to every Human being.

Funds invested in derivatives alone total at a minimum of \$544 trillion, and the high-end estimate is \$1.2 quadrillion. In fact, there is more money in derivatives than in all the stock markets combined, which is a comparatively paltry \$73 trillion.⁶ The Human “kingdom” is actually extremely rich. Humans have created technologies and structures, and products that actually produce massive amounts of wealth that is being transferred to the few thorough tax evasion, tax dodging, investing in suspicious and criminal activities, while at the same time funds on a much smaller scale necessary to help the poor, the hungry, the energy poor, to those exposed to climate change and pollution, are lacking.

If we look at the USA in 2017 about 15% of the population lived on less than 2US\$ per day⁷ while in much poorer countries of the world 689 million people were living on less than \$1.90 a day. At higher poverty levels, 24.1 percent of the world lived on less than

⁵ MarketWatch (2017, November 28). *Here’s all the money in the world, in one chart*. Link: <https://on.mktw.net/3mrqwR7> (last accessed November 22, 2020).

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ The Economist. (2019, June 20). *How many Americans live on \$2 a day?* Link: <https://econ.st/3r3h36c> (last accessed, November, 10, 2020).

\$3.20 a day and 43.6 percent on less than \$5.50 a day in 2017.⁸ It thus becomes clear that something is very seriously wrong with the day to day stewardship of Humans.

A preliminary estimate for 2020 incorporating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, projects that an additional 88 million to 115 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty, bringing the total of globally poor to number between 703 and 729 million. New research estimates that climate change will drive 68 million to 132 million into poverty by 2030. Climate change is a particularly acute threat for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia — the regions where most of the global poor are concentrated.⁹ This numbers and serious “jumps” of numbers under such challenges show how vulnerable at least half of the global population is.

In such a situation it would be completely irresponsible to state that with technology, through technological inventions, change could be achieved. As we remember from the history of industry the same universal solutions had been promoted in the form of limitless hydro-electric power, limitless nuclear power, limitless this and limitless that. But, the system was kept intact showing that without a deep and complete change of attitude on the part of man (both man and woman) the system will always remain the same, generating injustice, suffering, and division between people, all without ever reaching a solution.

As previously noted, climate change and pollution are a direct consequence of outdated technological solutions and are also generators of incredible social suffering throughout the whole planet.

⁸ The World Bank. (2020, October 7). Poverty. Link: <https://bit.ly/2WyhFml> (last accessed, November 20, 2020).

⁹ Ibid.

Similar levels of poverty, chronic diseases connected to pollution and growing social injustice are becoming more and more the main characteristics of Serbian and most Balkan societies.

Serbia and the Balkan are in all the climate change scenarios developed by a UN program for Climate Change (UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) being prone to radical and serious change in the weather patterns that will lead to changes in conditions of life that a significant number of the population will not be able to cope with, for example devastating floods, droughts, forest fires, loss of agricultural produce due to weather events, all of which puts the Balkans among regions that will be at high risk of poverty through climate change.

In Serbia at least 80% of the population can be considered poor since at least that percentage of the population spends much more than 10% of their income on energy, heat, fuel for transport, communal supplies (water) which means that they do not have sufficient funds for food and other needs that are of crucial importance in colder climates in which they live. Such poverty further means that at least half of the population in winter burns plastics, tires, and waste thereby polluting the air in Serbia and the Balkans to a high level.

WHY CAN THE MARKET NOT SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS?

Instead of theoretically predicting a trickling down of global (and domestic for that matter) overall societal income as a consequence of “liberalization” and “deregulation”/ freeing of “blind market forces,” instead we witness globally produced income and wealth being sucked upwards at an alarming rate. What is causing this? One of main reasons beside the clearly unjust mechanism of division of created value according to ruling economic science, is the fact that states (including Serbia) are massively under taxing

corporations and wealthy individuals, yet underfunding vital public services like healthcare and education.¹⁰ Thus leaving enormous space for the manipulation of taxes, avoidance of payment by the rich and, at the same time enabling a system in which even the rich admit that they are paying fewer taxes than the poorest citizens.

With such a defect in the global tax system, we witness a situation where overall God’s creation and all the resources given by God end up in fewer and fewer hands. The world’s 10 biggest corporations together have revenue greater than that of the government revenue of 180 countries combined.¹¹ One of the meanest and malicious facts of today’s world is that God’s creation is reflected in resources that were meant to serve *all people* in line with the original plan that God created man (humans) as King and Priest of all creation with the goal to use God given “material” blessings as equally distributed among all throughout the whole “world.” However, this have ended up in a selfish and ferocious “system” of a world of ferociously hungry consumers where few are owners of practically everything.

If we do not tackle the global scale of tax dodging and tax evasion, we will be never able to implement just division of necessary means for all humans while at the same time trying to eradicate the immoral behaviors of populations using state forces, state power, that at the same time systematically turning a blind eye to the most lucrative and most present form of criminal tax evasion.

¹⁰ OXFAM International. *5 shocking facts about extreme global inequality and how to even it up*. Link: <https://bit.ly/3roXx4e> (last accessed November 26, 2020).

¹¹ OXFAM Briefing Paper (2017). *An economy for the 99%*. p.3.

Mechanisms of tax evasion are the ones that are being used both by legally operating companies but also by the different forms of criminal organizations. It is precisely through such mechanisms that the concentration of wealth is extant, thereby crowding out all the means necessary for solving social problems, climate change issues and environmental destruction.

WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE ARE CREATED

God created humans as free beings. Proof of that is the deliberate failure of Adam and his sin. Without freedom, as God-Created human beings we would never have sinned and failed to fulfill the will of the Creator. Without freedom humans would be robots or automatons (directed vehicles). Despite being created as free we are not creators of our selves. Man (both man and woman) is created and as such Man was invited into existence (*Rom. 4,17*); therefore, we exist because God wanted us to exist based on His blessed and good will and his unselfish love.

Being created with reason and with potential to become God like, since we have been created in God's image and likeness,¹² Man has been given the most important role in the whole of creation to be the collaborator and associate of God Himself. Exactly because of this promised Unity of the whole of creation through Christ, he took on Himself the nature of the human because Nature cannot reunify with God without freedom which is the main characteristic of man.

To become one with God, the world should become the Body of Christ, which means that the world should become the church. If we want to become one with God together with the whole World

¹² *Genesis 1, 26.*

our change, Re-Birth- from above (καινή κτίσις- new creation Cf. 2 Cor. 5, 17) should be fully, profound, real, and reflected in our deeds coming from belief. That is why God created, established the Eucharist which is God’s Body and Blood that cleanses man and the world, reuniting it through the Holy Spirit in Christ. Only in the Mystery of the Eucharist does the world finally reach its final predestination and man reaches his final form as a Living Icon of God.

But what does this mean for our question? One of main characteristics of being a believing Christian is that he is using all the powers given by God to reform, restructure, change all of his behavior. That means that Christians do not pollute on purpose or even by chance, that Christians share all the material and other blessings, since he knows that everything, he possesses is a *gift from heaven*. Even more, it will be impossible for humans to become one again with God without Re-Birth of the whole Earth since Christ while on earth was not some ghost, an entity without *body*. There is an unbreakable tie between body and soul, body – soul and Holy Spirit and body and soul are one. Body without soul is a phantom and body without soul a corpse.¹³

As we know from the Bible due to sin, Man has been expelled from paradise and unity with God. Since Man has fallen out of this blessed unity through sin, the law of death has led to the condition of “war of all against all.” Logos or sense of all created beings is from eternity in line with, and in tune with God’s plan *but with sin* that broke the world, selfishness, greed, injustice, mercilessness became main characteristics of the world.

The World was created with the aim, goal, sense that it can through Man as the godlike creation and in unity with Him get back

¹³ Zdravko Peno, *Katihizis, osnove Pravoslavne vere*, (Beograd 2010), p. 97.

to the unity with God and fulfill its Logos. Such comeback to the unity is possible only thorough the Church that is the Body of Christ and through Liturgical unification of Heaven and Earth in the Heavenly-Earthly Church.¹⁴ Therefore, the world that was created through Christ and for Christ,¹⁵ through rebirth the Church becomes the living Icon of God. This is not possible without love, the sacrificial giving of oneself to fellow Man, giving up on egotism and greed.

Even in good faith with the best of intentions, if using only their limited rational powers, humans remain focusing their creative powers on themselves, on their limited (created) wishes and plans, actually focusing on their egotistic directions, trying to create the universe, the world and all of its structures (products) as separate from God.

With the will limited by egotism of scientism and technologism despite “good intentions,” humans missed the target (in Greek: ἀμαρτία, to miss, SIN) of absolute, Godlike freedom and “produced” the world as we know it today. More and more people are actually living without the Church, without hearing about Christ or hearing just some false or limited parts of His teachings. Therefore, it is clear that we live in a world that has willingly departed from God, having chosen to live without God and to even establish such legal systems that at their core have systemic and complete division from God, especially since the French Revolution and even more so in the

¹⁴ Incredibly precise word used by Serbian Orthodox Church theologians especially St. Justin Popovic.

¹⁵ *Col. 1,16*: “For in Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him.”

new world “after History,” “after all ideologies,” “after all the Patriarchal state systems.”

WHAT CAN WE DO
TO ACT AS BOTH CHRISTIANS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS?

Christians do not judge (and in that sense the description of the world situation in this article is not presented as a judgment), *but* at the same time God wants us to judge and make a Just judgment by saying: “stop Judging by outward appearances, and start judging justly (*John 7,24*) which means that while doing all we can to *change ourselves* through the power of the Spirit, cleansing us from our wrong doings, we do actually need to stand firm and to name things with real names.

This also means that we will need to stand up for those in need, to fight for those who suffer injustice, who suffer from pollution, destructive industrial and other practices, that we will need to stand and face not only individuals *but* moreover the state if it is acting destructively.

This should not be in hatred, anathematizing *but* moreover in Love of Christ, since everyone is sinning and everyone needs a savior. We are not better than others and that is why when we act we need to be fully dedicated to being led by the assistance and wisdom of God but also with the brevity of the children of God.

There should be zero tolerance for all the fiscal, technological, legal and institutional manipulations that produce pollution, destruction of “nature,” and the massive dodging of financial and other obligations (rules) thus leading to the situation where any and all positive actions always come up against a wall of lack of resources.

With its witnessing of the Truth, Christians are a “light which shines in the darkness” (*John 1,5*) thus clearly bringing consolation, hope, joy and strength to those suffering from the post “Christian”

System we live in, by doing decisive and brave actions to enlighten the darkness of technological, fiscal and other manipulations. Christians are showing the extent of knowledge and power that He possesses, how structures should be restructured and how ideologies without God produce more and more suffering.

But in the beginning or in the end we need to change our daily practices, routines, our behavior, how we produce energy, how we save precious energy, how we produce clean and healthy food etc. It is not easy but that is why God is giving us his strength.

A Priestly Call for Action: Stop Destroying the Planet Now!

FR. IOANNIS ECONOMIDES

The struggle for the protection of creation is a central dimension of our faith. Respect for the environment is a praise in practice of the name of God, while the destruction of creation is an insult to the Creator, completely incompatible with the basic assumptions of Christian theology. (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, September 1st, 2020)

The ecological problem is the most serious hardship humanity faces today. It is the essential problem of our life as it relates to its core: it is the way we consume the sacred world of which we are only a dependent part. Now the traditional criteria for the moral characterization of human actions recede in importance and relevance in view of the criterion of the environmental footprint. The dynamic of this decline is exponential. Nowadays a religion, a church, a theology that does not evaluate the ecological problem in this way has no reason to exist.

A recent UN report (The human cost of disasters: an overview of the last 20 years) states that our planet is becoming an inhospitable hell for millions of people due to the natural disasters caused by

anthropogenic climate change. Indeed, the flames of hell today are where the fossil fuels burn and intensify with the rise of the average global temperature. Its pollution is in our uncontrolled landfills where we recklessly get rid of the waste of our frantic consumer mania. The devil himself is the one who whispers in our ear to not only recklessly scatter the chemical fertilizers on our farms but also to buy the materials for our fasting food packed in disposable plastic in the supermarket. The devil's pleasurable amusement, human pain, culminates in disease and poverty caused by pollution, degradation and destruction of natural resources.

This is the most serious lack of social justice since the consequences, although ultimately affecting us all, primarily and to a significant degree affect the financially weak. It is more than obvious that the Christian eventually ceases to be a Christian if he remains a passive observer or even an accomplice to the sufferings caused by the environmental crisis. He must identify and fight every evil that tries to take over the world.

The Orthodox Church today is led by a Patriarch who recognizes the seriousness of the ecological problem and its theological and spiritual dimensions. But he does not deal only in words, but he carries out specific actions of informing and raising awareness of people, both Christians and non-Christians. His public word always contains references to the environmental issue. He has managed to become a central figure of interfaith dialogue while also collaborating with environmental movements and organizations. In his meetings with the powerful of this world, he stands by the weak and wronged of this world, of all those who first and to the greatest extent suffer the consequences of the ecological crisis. He does not hesitate to pastorally involve himself in certain local environmental problems as he did in the long-suffering industrial area of the Boeotian Asopos River, where I serve as a priest. This is the largest oper-

ating industrial area in Greece which “[...] is a microcosm of the global ecological crisis, synonymous with toxic waste and deadly pollution [...]” as Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stressed on the occasion of his visit on July 6th, 2017 strengthening our claims to the state and encouraging us also to continue the painstaking efforts to restore our region.

It is necessary in the local churches, parishes and monasteries of all countries and especially in our neighborhood in the Balkans to follow the example of our Ecumenical Patriarch. As Christians, we must stop consuming the world the way we do today. Let us try to produce less garbage, consume less fuel, use less plastics and fertilizers. It is the new form of *ascesis* that will measure all the other traditional forms with which the church has been training us for centuries. It is necessary for the ecclesiastical preaching to focus on the ecological problem and the way of life that our church proposes to include all those necessary spiritual and other adaptations in order to ensure the sustainability of the natural beauty that surrounds us. The daily spiritual-didactic work should give a dominant position regarding the information and awareness of the faithful about the environmental crisis. The comprehensive action and response to protect the environment must become a priority in church life.

A very special requirement is also the struggle against the rulers of this world who undermine with their choices the common environmental goods. Our church always promotes saints who did not hesitate to clash with the established order of their time. The Church must highlight again such saints today. As our Ecumenical Patriarch stated during his visit to our Asopos River,

It is for the sake of all to protect nature. In particular, local communities, farmers, stockbreeders, businessmen, teachers, priests, adults and children, need to be included in the front line of the environment. Our responsibility for the protection of the envi-

ronment is primarily a moral responsibility to God and of course to the whole of human society.

It is hopeful that one can find in the church area the first positive examples such as the installation of photovoltaic systems on Mount Athos. However, we just follow the developments instead of influencing them and we are far from the minimum level of spiritual vigilance and action that will ensure the preservation of the divine creation. At the same time it is indisputable that the local churches have many possibilities for action. One such possibility is that they usually own large areas of forest which they can protect. Another is the possibility of multifaceted support to local communities in the necessary de-lignification process to tackle the problem of climate change that will determine our survival. And finally, a great opportunity to prove that we serve Christ and not the devil could be the organization at the local level of a *dynamic ecclesiastical response to environmental oil extraction*. It is imperative as Christians to contribute to our own way of life but also in our actions so that governments stop making environmentally destructive choices that bring temporary benefits to the few and at the same time distribute to society multiple environmental and economic costs, undermining the true progress and prosperity of us all.

APPENDICES

A. GREAT AND HOLY SYNOD (CRETE, 2016)

The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World¹

F. The Mission of the Orthodox Church: As a Witness of Love through Service

§10. The yearning for continuous growth in prosperity and an unfettered consumerism inevitably lead to a disproportionate use and depletion of natural resources. Nature, which was created by God and given to humankind to work and preserve (cf. *Gen.* 2,15), endures the consequences of human sin: For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (*Rom.* 8,20-22).

The ecological crisis, which is connected to climate change and global warming, makes it incumbent upon the Church to do everything within her spiritual power to protect God's creation from the consequences of human greed. As the gratification of material needs, greed leads to spiritual impoverishment of the human being and to environmental destruction. We should not forget that the earth's natural resources are not our property, but the Creator's: The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world, and those who

¹ <https://bit.ly/30Xvmr4>

dwell therein (*Ps.* 23,1). Therefore, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the protection of God's creation through the cultivation of human responsibility for our God-given environment and the promotion of the virtues of frugality and self-restraint. We are obliged to remember that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator.

B. FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD:
TOWARD A SOCIAL ETHOS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH¹

IV. Poverty, Wealth, and Civil Justice

“Remember, Lord, those who are mindful of the poor”

§41 In any nation, the poor are almost always the first to suffer as a result of any general adverse conditions, natural or social, economic or political. And, in many places, poverty is as much the result of racial or class discrimination as of mere personal misfortune. The current environmental crisis, for instance—anthropogenic climate change, toxic pollution of water sources and soils around the world, ubiquitous damage to the entire ecosystem by microplastics and other contaminants, deforestation, soil erosion, the rapid decline of biological diversity, and so forth—is an incalculable catastrophe for the entire planet and for all terrestrial life. Almost invariably, however, the greatest immediate burden falls upon the less economically developed quarters of the earth, where governments can do—or elect to do—very little to protect the destitute against the consequences of industrial waste and general ecological devastation. It is the poor, moreover, who are most regularly displaced and further impoverished by the destruction of the environment around them. And, even in nations of the developed world, it tends to be the poorest citizens who are most routinely exposed to the dire results of environmental degradation and who lack the resources to remedy their situations. So long as immense discrepan-

¹ <https://bit.ly/34iu4im>

cies in wealth exist between nations and between individuals, social and political power will be the possession primarily of the rich, as will whatever degree of relative immunity from the consequences of human folly and corruption or natural calamity can be achieved by material means. So too will the best avenues of education or professional advancement, the best healthcare, the best legal protections, the best financial opportunities, the best access to institutions of political power, and so on. Great economic inequality is, inevitably, social injustice; it is, moreover, according to the teachings of Christ, a thing abominable in the eyes of God. Whole schools of economics arose in the twentieth century at the service of such inequality, arguing that it is a necessary concomitant of any functioning economy. Without fail, however, the arguments employed by these schools are tautologous at best, and proof of how impoverished the human moral imagination can make itself in servitude to ideology. The Church must trust instead in the assurances of Christ that, for those who seek God's Kingdom and its justice, God will provide all things. It must always, as heir to the missions of the prophets and to the Gospel of the incarnate God, be a voice first for the poor, and a voice raised whenever necessary against the rich and powerful, and against governments that neglect or abuse the weak in order to serve the interests of the strong. And the Church must in every generation, remembering the example of the Church of the Apostolic age, ask of every society whether there are not effective means—and perhaps new economic models—by which it would be possible to achieve a more just distribution of wealth, and thereby a more radical commitment to the common good, of society and of the planet we all must share. For St. Maria Skobtsova, this is a mandate addressed to everyone seeking to rise from earth to heaven and rejoice with the angels when a cup of water is offered to a single individual in the name of the Lord: "A person should have a more attentive

attitude to his brother's flesh than to his own. Christian love teaches us to give our brother not only material but also spiritual gifts. We must give him our last shirt and our last crust of bread. Here personal charity is as necessary and justified as the broadest social work. In this sense there is no doubt that the Christian is called to social work. He is called to organize a better life for the workers, to provide for the old, to build hospitals, care for children, fight against exploitation, injustice, want, lawlessness."

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*The Orthodox Churches in the Balkans
- in Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria-
have a paramount responsibility and momentous
role to play in raising awareness and shepherding
change in cultural perceptions and social convictions.*

*They are unquestionably important and
indispensable players in reminding Orthodox
faithful as well as all people of good will about
the inseparable link between creation and Creator
and about the moral injunction to care for
and safeguard “the earth and the fullness there
of that belong to the Lord” (Psalm 24.1). [...]*

*Our response to climate change emanates
from our faith, but it affects our everyday life.
This is why the Church must continue to work
toward and facilitate a local and regional response
to the ethical and existential threat
of the climate crisis.*

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew



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