

Orthodox Policies

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HE Metropolitan Mar Paulos Gregorios Indian Orthodox Church

New Testament Foundations for Understanding the Creation

A Lecture to Evangelical Christians at the Au Sable Forum on the Gospel and the Earth (Mancelona, Michigan, 1986)

The mindless and tragic decimation of the Himalayan forests was the result of the government's thoughtless felling of trees in that region. It resulted in heavy soil erosion, desertification and climate change. After trying many ways of stopping the government, Bahuguna (a Hindu follower of Gandhi) finally launched the "Embrace the Trees" movement [sometimes called Chipko]. He trained the village people to go and embrace a tree as the government workers came to cut it down. The people understood Bahuguna's goal and took on the concerns of the movement with enthusiasm. The highest government officials had to make major decisions to reduce the cutting of trees, decisions that would have been politically impossible without the Chipko movement.

But Bahuguna is a Hindu. In what follows, I will offer... three biblical passages, and then discuss the three ecological principles which I will extrapolate from them.

Text from Romans 8:18-25

First Principle:

Human redemption can be understood only as an integral part of the redemption of the whole creation.

For a long time we have been conditioned to understand the redemption of Christ primarily – and too often exclusively – in terms of personal salvation. A basic requirement for a healthy Christian approach to the human environment seems to be a shift of gears in this regard.

What is a “person” whose salvation Christ effects? A person exists only in relation – in relation to other human persons (his or her father and mother, to begin with) and to non-human realities (light, air, water, food, etc.)....

Both the Pauline and Johannine witnesses in the New Testament strongly affirm this redemption of the whole creation – cosmic redemption, if you like, or the participation of all creation in the liberation of humanity from the bondage to sin and death.

We have seriously distorted the biblical perspective on redemption by introducing alien categories like “nature” and “history” into it, and by understanding redemption only in terms of souls and persons....

Text from Colossians 1:15-23

Second Principle:

Christ himself should be seen in his three principal relationships: (1) to members incorporated into his body, (2) to the human race, and (3) to the other than human orders of created existence in a many-planed universe. Each of these is related to the other.

A Christology based on this principle will not conceive of Christ as somehow other than the created order. Today much of Christology sees Christ as being separate from the world, from culture, and so forth. We try to affirm the Lordship of Christ *over* world and culture by conceiving even the incarnate Christ as somehow totally distinct from the created order. We then think of him as Lord of the world, Lord of the Church, and so on.... Some even make him “sole mediator” between the person and God.

This kind of disjunctive thinking has to give way to an integral and participative way of understanding Christ.... As Christians we are united to him in an especially intimate way.... He [now] has a larger body, partly in heaven (i.e., beyond the horizon of our senses) and partly here on earth. We belong to that body as a whole, but particularly to the earthly part of it.

Text from John 1:1-5

Third Principle:

Christ and the Holy Spirit are related to the whole created order in three ways: by creating it, by redeeming it, and finally by fulfilling it in the last great consummation.

The act of creation is a corporate act of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. God’s relation to plants and trees, to air and water, did not begin with the redemption in the incarnate Christ. Not a single thing exists that did not come into being without Christ and the Holy Spirit.... [All things that exist] exist because they are sustained by God. The creative energy of God is the true being of all that is; matter is that spirit or energy in physical form. Therefore, we should regard our human environment as the energy of God in a form that is accessible to our senses.

It is a redeemed cosmos that we meet in the environment, and as such it is worthy of respect.

“We should regard our human environment as the energy of God in a form that is accessible to our senses.”

It is the final *apokatastasis*, the fulfillment at the end, that still needs to be stressed. The consummation... means adding up everything (Ephesians 1:10) – that is, the consummation of the whole created order in Christ.

Orthodox Perspectives on Creation

Report of the WCC Inter-Orthodox Consultation, Sofia, Bulgaria, October 1987 (Extracts)

Creation and Holy Trinity

1. We believe that the created world itself is a ‘mystery’ originating in the sovereign will of God accomplished by the action (*energia*) of the Holy Trinity. We confess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (325/381) that the Father is the “Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible”, the Son “He through whom all things were made”, and the Holy Spirit, the “Creator of life” (*zoopion*). Thus, the three persons created together the world, which is the fruit of the common action of the Holy Trinity issuing out of the one essence.

2. As St. Basil the Great said, “We should understand in the creation the original cause of the Father as a founding cause, the cause of the Son as a creative, and the cause of the Spirit as an implementing one.” Thus the Father is the “Creator of all things”, the Son is the one “through whom all things were made”, and the Holy Spirit is the one “in whom are all things”. Everything that he (God the Creator) had made ... was very good” (Gen. 1:31), because “first He conceived, and His conception was a work carried out by His Word, and perfectly by His Spirit.

3. Thus, the action of the Holy Spirit, rooted in the Father, is presented as the ‘economy’ of the Son and the Spirit: the former bringing God’s desire into existence and the latter perfecting it in goodness and beauty; the one calling the creation and leading it to the Father, and the other helping the creation to respond to His call and communicating perfection to it. Thus, the creation is the result of the communion (*koinonia*), close relationship and cooperation of the Holy Trinity. The community of three Persons participates actively in the execution of the whole of God’s plan.

Creation “out of nothing”

4. “In the beginning” the Holy Trinity created the world (heaven and earth) “out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*) and not out of preexistent matter. The world is a production of God’s free will, goodness, wisdom, love and omnipotence. God did not create the world in order to satisfy some need of His. Rather he created it without compulsion and without force in order that it might enjoy His blessings and share in His goodness. God then brought all things into being out of nothing, creating both the visible and the invisible.

5. “Out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*) finds its first expression in the Bible. “Beholding the heavens and the earth, and seeing all that is there, you will understand that God has created it all from nothing” (2 Macc. 7:28). Thus, the creation springs into being or passes into being out of non-being. As St. Gregory of Nyssa affirms, “It begins to be, and the very substance of the creation owes its beginning to change”. This transition from non-existence is a change brought about by God’s creative Word “who has established the world so that it shall not be moved” (Ps. 93:1).

Creation of the cosmos- integrity of the world

6. God is the Creator of the world. The world as cosmos, i.e. a created order with its own integrity, is a positive reality. It is the good work of the good God (Gen. 1), made by God for the blessed existence of humanity. The Cappadocian Fathers teach that God first creates the world and beautifies it like a palace, and then leads humanity into it. The genesis of the cosmos, being in becoming, is a mystery (*mysterion*) for the human mind, a genesis produced by the Word of God. As such, the world is a revelation of God (Rom. 1:19-20). Thus, when its intelligent inhabitants see it as cosmos, they come to learn about the Divine wisdom and the Divine energies. The cosmos is a

coherent whole, a created synthesis, because all its elements are united and interrelated in time and space. A serious study of the mystery of creation, through faith, prayer, meditation and science, will make a positive contribution to the recognition of the integrity of creation. The daily office of the Church (vespers) begins with a psalm which exalts the beauty of this mystery (Ps. 103), while the Fathers of the Church often comment on the various biblical passages which describe the integrity of the creation.

Value of the creation

7. The value of the creation is seen not only in the fact that it is intrinsically good, but also in the fact that it is appointed by God to be the home for living beings. The value of the natural creation is revealed in the fact that it was made for God (something which is beautifully expressed in Orthodox iconography), i.e. to be the context for God's Incarnation and humankind's deification, and as such, the beginning of the actualization of the Kingdom of God. We may say that the cosmos provides the stage upon which humankind moves from creation to deification. Ultimately, however, the whole of the creation is destined to become a transfigured world, since the salvation of humankind necessarily involves the salvation of its natural home, the cosmos.

Human being as a microcosm

8. The fact that Adam and Eve were created by God last of all the other created beings and in a different way - not just by the utterance of a Divine Word but by the direct involvement and action of God - indicates not only the outstanding position of the human in the whole of the creation, but also its special relation to God. According to the Church Fathers, Genesis 1:26 ff, "...Let us make man ...(*poiesomen anthropon*) shows that the creation of the human being was the result of a Trinitarian act. Particularly significant in this connection is the statement that "man was made according to the image and the likeness of God". The reference to "the image of God" is to be understood in terms of Jesus Christ, since he is explicitly identified with it (2 Cor.4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3 ff). Thus for mankind to be in the image of God means to be in, or assimilated to, Christ. This is a matter of grace and act and not a matter of nature, because only Christ is by nature God's image as God's eternal and natural offspring, his only begotten Son. The "likeness of God" is often connected with the grace of the Spirit who assimilates us to Christ.

9. In the created world only the human being combines material and spiritual elements. Human existence is thus differentiated from non-human creation in a qualitative way. In light of this fact, the Church Fathers often speak of the human being as a "little world", a "microcosm" of the whole of the creation. Using this notion, the Church Fathers teach that the human body contains in it all levels of existence of the natural world which preceded it in order of the creation, and considered the physical elements which make up the human body as in no way different from those which constitute the physical world. This means that the natural world is fully integrated with the human being and the whole of the creation.

10. At the same time, the Fathers' use of the notion of microcosm means that humanity, created in God's image and likeness, transcends the material world because it participates in God spiritually and consciously, unlike the rest of the creation. Humankind then stands on the boundary (*methorion*) between the material and the spiritual worlds as a connecting link. It is directly related to the earthly aspect of created existence as well as to the untreated existence of the Creator. As such, on the one hand, it directly influences our thinking about the integrity of creation, and on the other hand it gives to human nature a dynamic spiritual dimension.

11. St. Gregory the Theologian says that we are fully involved with the material creation by virtue of our physical existence, and that the material created reality is deeply involved with us. If we move to the direction of deification, our human nature, progressing towards God, will somehow carry the created material world with it. If, however, we move to the opposite direction, the created world will suffer with us as well (cf. Rom. 8:19-22). This means that we are called to exercise dominion over all creatures on earth (cf. Gen. 1:28), i.e. to be stewards (*oikonomoi*) of God's material world, caring for it, maintaining it in its integrity and perfecting it by opening it up to God through our own deification.

The Incarnation as the renewal of the creation

12. God's will, wisdom and love for the creation in general and for humankind in particular are revealed in the Incarnation in an inexpressible way. The Son of God, as the one through whom the process of creation was fulfilled, came down from heaven into the world and became fully man, i.e. assumed human nature in its integrity and led it to the fulfillment of its God-given destiny, deification. The Orthodox Church teaches that the Virgin Mother of God, the Theotokos, is the model of the renewal of humankind and the creation in Christ. In her receiving of the Son of God, the whole humankind and the whole of the creation participate. In the Incarnate God the Father "made known. His will ... as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). In other words, Jesus Christ, the Son of God became man, restored and renewed humanity and the whole of the creation, uniting both of them with the Creator in and through Himself. One of the Trinity, thus, became Incarnate, became man, revealing his Lordship over the whole of the creation, and showing humanity a Lordship in stewardship and service.

II. Disintegrated creation

The human fall and the disintegration of creation

13. Before their fall the first human beings experienced the creation as one harmonious whole. It was like a beautiful garden (*paradeisos*, Gen. 2:8) which they tended with care and love. The human fall, however, which was essentially a sinful exercising of human freedom, introduced forces of disintegration into the body of creation. Humanity experienced a two-fold alienation. On the one hand, it was estranged from the Creator, since Adam and Eve tended to hide themselves away from the sight of God (cf. Gen. 3:8) as their communion with the source of life and light was broken. On the other hand, humanity lost its capacity to enter into a proper relation with nature and with the body of the creation. Enmity between the natural world and human beings replaced the relationship of harmony and care. Domination and exploitation of the creation for selfish ends by greedy human beings became the order of history. Thus, manifold forms of disintegration set in which converged in the fact of death and corruption. Fear of death instilled anxiety, acquisitiveness, greed, hatred and despair in human beings. Modern forms of economic exploitation, racial oppression, social inequalities, war, genocide, etc. are all consequences of the fear of death and collective signs of death.

The environmental crisis

(...) 18. Environmental issues like air and water pollution, depletion of non-renewable resources, destruction of the ozone layer, increasing nuclear radiation, deforestation and desertification of vast areas, etc. threaten the life itself on this planet. The gifts of science and technology are being misused by human beings to the extent of abusing nature and turning today's life on earth into a hell, not only for the many millions of existing people but also for the generations to come. The voice of those who call for a just development, equal distribution of resources and ecological lifestyles is being systematically suppressed. Advances in bio-technology and genetic engineering need to be seen in the light of the Holy Spirit because without adequate knowledge of the transcendent (divine) vocation and spiritual nature of humanity, these new techniques run the risk of initiating biological disruption leading to a disastrous mutations that are extremely dangerous for the true life on earth. While human creativity and freedom can be armed as supreme gifts of God, it should also be emphasized that they should be rooted in divine wisdom and in human spiritual maturity. A reintegrated environment

(...) 37. The environmental crisis is a sin and a judgement upon humanity. We need to find ways, as churches, to support sound programmes which seek to preserve from pollution air, water and land. To speak of the reintegration of creation today is first to speak words of repentance and to make commitments toward the formation of a new way of living for the whole of humanity. The contemporary world must repent for the abuses which we have imposed upon the natural world, seeing it in the same kind of relationship to us as we see the unity of our human nature in both body and soul. We must begin to undo the pollution we have caused, which brings death and destruction to the mineral, vegetable and animal dimensions of the world environment. We must work and lobby in

every way possible to us in our different situations to encourage the scientific community to dedicate the good potentials of science and technology to the restoration of the earth's integrity. For ourselves, this means a recommitment to the simple life which is content with necessities and - with the Church Fathers - sees unnecessary luxuriousness as the deprivation of necessities owed to the poor. In all of its aspects, concern for the reintegration of the creation calls Christians to a new affirmation of self-discipline, a renewal of the spirit of asceticism appropriate to Christians, regardless of their status, position or condition. In short, we must see the created world as our own home, and every person in it as our brother and sister whom Christ loves.

Conclusions

(...) 45. We confess that God is the creator of all that exists, beautifully and wonderfully made, a fitting manifestation of His glory (cf. Ps. 103). But we stand today before a wounded creation which suffers under distorted conditions which are the result of the sin of humanity. In our selfishness and greed we have used our otherwise good technological abilities to exploit God's creation, to destroy the balance of nature and to deform what God originally made to be in wholesome communion with us and with Him. Creation is no longer integrated with humanity nor is it in harmony with God. In fact, it stands in danger of conflagration, in the face of nuclear war.

46. The creation needs to be reintegrated, but this can happen only as it is brought once again into communion with the Lord, so that it may find its fullness of purpose and its transfiguration. Humanity can no longer ignore its responsibility to protect it and preserve it. In order to do this, however, humanity must learn to treat the creation as a sacred offering to God, an oblation, a vehicle of grace, an incarnation of our most noble aspirations and prayers.

47. Just as bread and wine are likened up as an offering for the sanctification of the world and all people in the Eucharist, a sacramental approach to the creation is needed for its reintegration.

49. The Lord God created His universe and all that is in it as an integrated whole. Today, we have brought about disintegration in what God intended to be integrated. We call upon individuals, nations and churches to give effect to a vision of the rightful harmony between the human dimension and the mineral, plant and animal dimensions of the creation. In spirit and in body, we are called to offer the whole of God's creation back to Him as a sacrament and as an offering cleansed, purified, restored for His sanctification of it.

50. O God, "the things that are Yours, we offer them to You according to all things and for all things. Amen." May this be our prayer for the "integrity of God's creation".

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Patriarch Ignatius IV

Antiochian Orthodox Church

A Theology of Creation

Excerpts from a Lecture to the Swiss Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Federation of Swiss

Protestant Churches

Zurich, Switzerland

March 10, 1989

The Word became flesh to open to us, through the holy flesh of the earth transformed into the Eucharist, the path to deification. ... But man has wanted to make himself divine by means of his own powers.... He has wanted to make of the world his prey, to be its tyrant and not its king and priest.

Man has made for himself, out of the potential transparency of all things when restored in Christ, the mirror of Narcissus.

Today that mirror is breaking up; the maternal sea is polluted, the heavens are rent, the forests are being destroyed and the desert areas are increasing. We must protect creation. Better yet, we must embellish it, render it spiritual, transfigure it. But nothing will be done unless there is a general conversion of men's minds and hearts. Nothing will happen unless our personal and liturgical prayer, our sacramental life, our asceticism regain their cosmic dimension.

“The mystical way in Orthodoxy requires... the contemplation of nature.”

The Church is a eucharistic mystery which gives us knowledge of a universe which was created to become a Eucharist. “Make Eucharist (i.e. give thanks) in all things,” as Paul says (1 Thes. 5:18). In this perspective the Fathers maintain that the historical Bible gives us the key to the cosmic Bible.

The relationship between Scripture and the world corresponds to that of the soul and the body: he who has in Christ a spiritual understanding of the first will be given a profound understanding of the second.

It falls to man to decipher in a creative way the “book of the world,” this immense “*logos alogos*,” or “speechless word,” as Origen defined the world.

In Genesis God asks Adam to “name the animals,” a naming which includes all modes of knowledge and expression, from contemplation to art and science. Man is a microcosm, a synthesis of all creation, which he can therefore know from within; he is the interface between the visible and the invisible, between the carnal and the spiritual. But man is above all a *person*, in the image and likeness of God. As such he transcends the universe, not in order to leave it behind, but in order to contain it, to give expression to its praise and thereby cause grace to shine forth within it. ...

Cosmology is inseparable from the history of salvation. Orthodox theology, spirituality and all the experience of Eastern Christianity stress that the Fall, the occultation of man's condition in paradise, constitutes a truly cosmic catastrophe. But it is a catastrophe which is not accessible to science, because it took place in another dimension of reality and because scientific observation belongs inevitably to the modalities of our fallen existence. ...

God did not create death. But he has used it in the present stage of evolution, up to the point of becoming incarnate, so as to crush spiritual death and give back to man his vocation as created creator and to restore to matter its sacramental character. Christ, through his Incarnation, his Resurrection, his Ascension and his sending of the Holy Spirit, has brought about the potential transfiguration of the universe.... In Him, fallen matter no longer imposes its limitations and determinisms; in him the world, frozen by our downfall, melts in the fire of the Spirit and rediscovers its vocation in transparency. And so we have the miracles of the Gospel; in no way are they “wonders” to impress us, but “signs,” anticipations of the ultimate re-creation of the world. A world without death comes into sight, where things are presences and men, at last, are faces....

“The metamorphosis of the cosmos requires not only that God should become man in Christ, but also that man should become God in the Holy Spirit.”

At the same time this transfiguration remains a secret, hidden under the veil of the sacraments, out of respect for our freedoms. Though illuminated in Christ, the world nevertheless remains darkened by us, fixed in its opacity by our own spiritual opacity, delivered over to the forces of chaos by our own inner chaos.

The metamorphosis of the cosmos requires not only that God should become man in Christ, but also that man should become God in the Holy Spirit, that is, should become fully man, capable of the gentleness of the strong and of the love which knows how to submit itself to all that lives, in order to make it grow. Christ has made men capable of receiving the Spirit, that is, of collaborating with the cosmic coming of the Kingdom.

Patriarch Ignatius IV

Antiochian Orthodox Church

The Responsibility of Christians

Excerpts from the third lecture to the Swiss Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches

March 12, 1989

Christianity... has thrust man forward, for the final stage of cosmogenesis, with a mission to explore and assume the universe, from the atom to the galaxy....

Today the earth no longer encloses man in her stifling and fecund maternity. [Yet] quite near here, the forest is dying of acid rain, the forest, this primordial temple... Why and how have we come to this? Christianity stopped treating the world as a god, but this was in order to make it holy. Has Christianity betrayed its cosmic mission, has it given up, resigned, withdrawn?

The separation of Western and Eastern Christianity in the second half of the Middle Ages profoundly modified the spiritual context in which technology developed. The Age of Antioch, above all in its Syrian dimension, has elaborated a truly cosmic view of love, an immense compassion, for example, for the animal world. St. Isaac the Syrian asked, "What is a compassionate heart? It is a heart which burns for the whole of creation,... for the birds, for the beasts of the earth..., for every creature.... So strong, so violent is this compassion that his heart breaks when it sees the misfortune and the suffering of the least creature. This is why it prays even for the snakes, in the immense, immeasurable compassion which arises in the heart, which is in the image of God."

*"Christianity stopped treating the world as
a god, but this was to make it holy.
Has Christianity betrayed its cosmic mission,
has it given up, resigned, withdrawn?"*

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

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

Asceticism is therefore indispensable if we are to achieve that limitation of needs which will make it possible for us both to respect better the earth, its rhythms and the life which belongs to it, and to bring into operation the necessary sharing on a planetary scale.

To asceticism there needs to be joined what I shall call “creative exorcism”: i.e., we need to exorcize the undeclared but invasive totalitarianism of a limitless technology... [This] means to fight, in the name of the truth of all beings and things, against the Promethean temptation to construct the world as a closed totality of which man would be the little god. ...

What should animate science is both a desire to reduce by rational means the unknown and a respect for the mystery of things when contemplated vertically... Ilya Prigogine writes: “Scientific knowledge can reveal itself today as a poetic listening to nature.” Reason as instrument has “disenchanted” the world, ... and reason as contemplation has now to teach us to admire and to respect it.

“We need to exorcize the invasive totalitarianism of a limitless technology... [This] means to fight... the Promethean temptation to construct the world as a closed totality of which man would be the little god.”

In this way exorcism becomes creative. It opens up another way of looking at reality through even the most careful research; the look which re-enchants!

Let us summon humanity to a common task, drawn by our love of man as the image of God and of the universe, and as the creation of God.

It will be a common task if all Christians take part in it and share their experience and their hope, those of the West and those of the East, those of the North and those of the South.

Christians will act by giving a cosmic dimension to their prayer, to their hearing of the Word... Christians will act by example, by showing the cultural, social and ecological richness of traditional ascetic values when they open out onto history: here I am thinking above all, I repeat, of the voluntary limitation of our needs and of a profound sympathy for all life. ...

“Christians will act by example, by showing the cultural, social and ecological richness of traditional ascetic values....”

This work of common vivification will provoke a spiritual revolution, the repercussions of which will gradually be inscribed in social and economic life. We who belong to the end of the second millennium, who are so often orphans without hearth or home, shall find Christ in our dwellings. Christ unites heaven and earth, and the Church in its depths is the world on its way to christification.

“Asceticism is indispensable if we are to achieve that limitation which will make it possible for us to respect better the earth and the life which belongs to it, and to bring into operation sharing on a planetary scale.”

Biblical and evangelical revelation has desanctified the earth, not in order to abandon it to the forces of nothingness, but to transfigure it. The earth today is no longer the all powerful Mother. May she become the betrothed, whom we must protect from rape and lead to the wedding of the Lamb.

Excerpted from “Message of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios on the Day of the Protection of the Environment,” Sept. 1, 1989.

This Ecumenical Throne of Orthodoxy, keeper and proclaimer of the centuries-long spirit of the patristic tradition, and faithful interpreter of the eucharist and liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church, watches with great anxiety the merciless trampling down and destruction of the natural environment which is caused by human beings, with extremely dangerous consequences for the very survival of the natural world created by God.

...In view of this situation the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved. It constitutes a fundamental dogma of her faith that the world was created by God the Father, who is confessed in the Creed to be ‘maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.’ According to the great Fathers of the Church, Man is the prince of creation, endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being partaker simultaneously of the material and the spiritual world, he was created in order to refer back creation to the Creator, in order that the world may be saved from decay and death.

... we . . . declare the first day of September of each year . . . to be the day of the protection of the environment. ... we paternally urge on the one hand all the faithful in the world to admonish themselves and their children to respect and protect the natural environment, and on the other hand all those who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing the nations to act without delay taking all necessary measures for the protection and preservation of the natural creation. ...”

The Primates of All the Canonical Churches
Joint Statement of the Orthodox Primates
March 15, 1992
Constantinople

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Gathered together in the Holy Spirit in consultation, the 15th day of March, 1992, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, by the initiative and invitation, and under the presidency of the first among us, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, after the expressed will of other brother Primates, we, by the mercy of God, the Primates of the local Most Holy Patriarchates and Autocephalous and Autonomous Orthodox Churches:

Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch
Parthenios, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa
Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
Diodoros, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine
Alexiy, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia
Paul, Patriarch of Belgrade and All Serbia
Teoctist, Patriarch of Bucharest and All Romania
Maxim, Patriarch of Sofia and All Bulgaria
Elias, Archbishop of Metschetis and Tiflis and Catholicos, Patriarch of All Georgia (represented by the Ecumenical Patriarch)
Chrysostomos, Archbishop of Neas Justinianis and All Cyprus (represented by the Patriarch of Alexandria)
Seraphim, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece
Wasyli, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland
Dorothej, Metropolitan of Prague and All Czechoslovakia
John, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland

have conferred in brotherly love on matters preoccupying our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church and have concelebrated the Holy Eucharist in the Patriarchal Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on this Sunday which for centuries has been dedicated to Orthodoxy. On this occasion we wish to declare the following:
...

2. The Most Holy Orthodox Church throughout the *oikumene*, sojourning in the world and being inevitably affected by the changes taking place in it, finds herself confronted with particularly severe and urgent problems that she desires to face as one body, adhering to St. Paul, who said: “if one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor.12:26). Moreover, looking in the future of humankind and that of the whole of God’s creation, in light of our entrance into the third millennium a.d. of history, at a time of rapid spiritual and social changes, fulfilling her sacred duty, the Church wishes to bear her own witness, giving account for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15) in humility, love and boldness.

The twentieth century can be considered the century of great achievements in the field of knowledge concerning the universe and the attempt to subject creation to human will. During this century, the strength as well as the weakness of the human being have surfaced. After such achievements, no one doubts any longer that the domination of humanity over its environment does not necessarily lead to happiness and the fullness of life. Thus, humanity must have learned that, apart from God, scientific and technological progress becomes an instrument of destruction of nature as well as of social life. This is particularly evident after the collapse of the communist system.

Alongside this collapse we must recognize the failure of all anthropocentric ideologies that have created in people of this century a spiritual void and an existential insecurity and have led many people to seek salvation in new religious and para-religious movements, sects or nearly idolatrous attachments to the material values of this world. ...

“The careless and self-indulgent use of material creation by humanity, with the help of scientific and technological progress, has already started to cause irreparable damage to the natural environment.”

3. All of these things call the Orthodox to a deeper spiritual as well as canonical unity. ...

6. Now at the end of the second millennium ad, turning our thoughts more specifically to the general problems of the contemporary world and sharing in the hope but also in the anxieties of humankind, we observe the following:

The rapid progress of technology and the sciences, which provide the instruments for improving the quality of life and relief of pain, misfortune, and illnesses, has unfortunately not always been accompanied by analogous spiritual and ethical foundations. As a result the aforementioned progress is not without serious dangers.

Thus, in human social life, the fact that only a section of humanity accumulates the privileges of this progress and the power proceeding from it exacerbates the misfortune of other people and creates an impetus for agitation or even war. The coexistence of this progress with justice, love and peace is the only safe and sure road, so that this progress will not be transformed from a blessing into a curse in the millennium to come. ...

“The Orthodox Church... invites all Orthodox to dedicate the first day of September of each year... to the offering of prayers and supplication for the preservation of God’s creation.”

Tremendous are also the problems that come out of this progress for humankind's survival as a free person created in the image and likeness of God.

Similar are the dangers for the survival of the natural environment. The careless and self-indulgent use of material creation by humanity, with the help of scientific and technological progress, has already started to cause irreparable damage to the natural environment. Unable to remain passive in the face of such destruction, the Orthodox Church, through us, invites all the Orthodox to dedicate the first day of September of each year, the day of the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, to the offering of prayers and supplication for the preservation of God's creation.

The Church also entreats all the Orthodox to adopt the attitude to nature found in the Eucharist and to ascetic traditions of the Church.

7. In view of such tremendous possibilities, as well as dangers, for contemporary humanity, the Orthodox Church hails every progress toward reconciliation and unity. ...

This, in the love of the Lord, we proclaim on the Great and Holy Sunday of Orthodoxy, urging the pious Orthodox Christians in the *oikoumene* to be united around their canonical pastors and calling all those who believe in Christ to reconciliation and solidarity in confronting the serious dangers threatening the world at this time.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

**HE Metropolitan Nicholas of Amisso
Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church
(Excerpt from a 1994 statement, Halki)**

“Mounting upon the Cross as if on a plow, the Saviour uprooted the thorns of our transgression and now wears them as a crown of victory. He teaches us a new husbandry that cultivates both the ‘ground’ of our being and the ‘ground’ we call earth with love and sacrifice, and has as its end our communion with Him, each other and the ‘oikos’ we live in. It is only as we experience this communion with God that we can experience union with the cosmos.”

The Primates of All the Canonical Churches

Joint Message of the Orthodox Primates

September 26, 1995
The Island of Patmos

“Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Rev. 7:12)

1. We offer glory, praise and thanksgiving to our Triune God for once again deeming us worthy, the Primates of the local Most Holy Orthodox Churches by His mercy and grace, to convene at this time “on the island called Patmos” (Rev. 1:9) for the celebration together of the completion of 1,900 years since St. John wrote the sacred book of Revelation, the conclusion of the Church's Holy Scriptures.

Radiantly solemnizing together and concelebrating in the Lord the sacred commemoration of the holy glorious Apostle and Evangelist John, and partaking of the Bread and the Cup of our common faith, hope and love, it is our desire to direct a message of peace and love to the faithful of our Most Holy Orthodox Church, to all those who believe in Christ, as well as to every person of good will so that we may unite with them in listening to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) during these critical times.

*“The misunderstanding of freedom...
leads to... the violation of the natural
world and to ecological destruction.”*

2. These are indeed critical times, making the responsibility of the Church of Christ, not only to her children, but also to all of humanity in general and to all of God’s creation, a somber and multifaceted matter. The apostasy of humankind from God and the effort to deify human power and happiness, the altar upon which everything – our fellow human beings and all the rest of the material creation – is sacrificed, prompt and intensify this crisis, which many characterize as “apocalyptic.”

During this time, we believe it is our obligation to underscore what the revelation in Christ means for the progress of humanity, peace and fellowship of all peoples. It is the responsibility of the Orthodox Churches to contribute in every way possible to the realization and prevalence of these principles throughout the world, by becoming bearers and messengers of the spirit and ethos of the revelation. Therefore, from this sacred place, sanctified by the Evangelist of love, we make an appeal to all – foremost to those who exercise power on earth and those who live in the regions of conflicts and wars – for the sake of peace and justice for all. ...

4. This message is addressed during a critical point in human history, as we approach the end of the second millennium after Christ and the dawn of the twenty-first century.

8. During these times of rampant secularization, there is an even greater need to point out and underscore the significance of the holiness of life in view of the spiritual crisis that characterizes the modern world. The misunderstanding of freedom as permissiveness leads to increased crime and to a lack of respect for the freedom of one’s neighbor and for the sanctity of life. What is more, it leads to the violation of the natural world and to ecological destruction. The Orthodox tradition is the bearer of a spiritual ethos that must be emphasized particularly in our times....

*“...we reiterate through this present message
the vigorous concern of the Orthodox Church
for the right use of the environment.”*

10. Most especially with regard to the ecological crisis, which for all of us is crucial and threatening, we reiterate through this message the vigorous concern of the Orthodox Church for the right use of the environment.

Already during our previous meeting at the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate [1992], we expressed this conviction while recording that, by the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, conferences related to this issue have been organized and September 1st of each year has been designated as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment.

Once more, we affirm that we consider this issue eminently threatening, and we call upon all to be vigilant and to take every necessary avenue in order to save and protect God’s creation. The Orthodox Church considers humankind to be a steward and not the owner of material creation. This perception is particularly expressed in the

tradition and experience of the ascetic life and worship, and above all in the Eucharist. It is imperative today that we all display love and keep an ascetic attitude toward nature.

15. In a world confronted by all kinds of sects and terrifying interpretations of the Book of Revelation, all of us, especially the younger generation, are called to learn and to bear witness ... to the fact that only the love of God, of our fellow human beings, and of all His creation offers meaning and salvation to our lives, even during the most difficult periods of history. ...

From this sacred island of Patmos we address this message to you, beloved ones in Christ, embracing you in His name and bringing to you and all the world the voice of the sacred author of the Apocalypse, a voice of faith, hope and love. "Behold, the dwelling of God is with (people). He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4).

"The Orthodox Church considers humankind to be a steward and not the owner of material creation."

... On the sacred island of Patmos, this 26th day of September, 1995, the feast of the holy glorious Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian.

+ The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, also representing the Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine Diodorus
+ The Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa Parthenios,
+ The Patriarch of Antioch and All the East Ignatius, represented by Metropolitan John of Pergamon
+ The Patriarch of Belgrade and All Serbia Pavle
+ The Patriarch of Bucharest and All Romania Teoctist
+ The Patriarch of Sofia and All Bulgaria Maximos, represented by Metropolitan Gelasios
+ The Archbishop of Metschetis and Tiflis and Katholicos, Patriarch of All Georgia Elias (represented by Bishop Abraham of Nikortzmenta
+ The Archbishop of New Justiniate and All Cyprus Chrysostomos
+ The Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Serapheim
+ The Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania Anastasios
+ The Archbishop of Prague and All Czechoslovakia Dorotheos
+ The Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland John

**His Beatitude Alexey II
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia
Protecting the Creation of God
Yalta, Crimea
September 24, 1997**

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

"The care of Creation... is our practical task but also a spiritual and religious duty, a fulfillment of the commandment of God."

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

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

“We must understand the need to work together for the transfiguration of this wonderful... land...”

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

Editor Note: Most of HB Patriarch Alexey’s ecological comments exist only in Russian. Translations of these statements are usually not made for dissemination in English. This is also true for other patriarchates, especially those in smaller countries.

His Beatitude Teoctist
Patriarch of Bucharest and All Romania
Comments on Ecological Concern
Constanta, Romania *
September 25, 1997

A special emphasis must be put on the spiritual and religious aspect... [for improving the environment].... One will meet ecological concerns from a religious point of view if one takes into account the words of Genesis which witness the spirit of God in creation.

It is in this sense that the Romanian people emerged in history as a Christian people, understanding God as a Sun that sends out light, life and love, the uncreated energies, over the whole of creation....

Both God’s transcendence beyond creation and his immanence in creation are very important for the efforts we make for preserving the integrity of the environment.

His Beatitude Maxim
Patriarch of Sofia and All Bulgaria
September 26, 1997 *
Varna, Bulgaria

The Bulgarian community, whether represented by its state authorities... or its religious and cultural organizations, is conscious of its responsibility for the reduction and elimination of effluents that harm the Black Sea. ...

In our community the harmful exploitation of nature, the creation of God, is no longer tolerated. It is incumbent on us to use the material 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.

“We should hand [the material world] on to the generations that come after us... enhanced and with greater capacity for supporting life.”

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I
Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome

Sacrifice: The Missing Dimension

Address by His All Holiness at the Closing Ceremony
of the Fourth International Environmental Symposium

June 10, 2002

Venice, Italy

As we come to the close of our Fourth Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment, we offer thanks to God for the fruitful proceedings as well as for your invaluable contribution. We recall the prophetic words of our predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I of blessed memory. In his historic encyclical letter of 1989, urging Christians to observe September 1st as a day of prayer for the protection of the environment, he emphasized the need for all of us to display a “eucharistic and ascetic spirit.”

Let us reflect on these two words ‘*eucharistic*’ and ‘*ascetic*.’ The implications of the first word are easy to appreciate. In calling for a ‘eucharistic spirit,’ Patriarch Dimitrios was reminding us that the created world is not simply our possession but it is a gift – a gift from God the Creator, a healing gift, a gift of wonder and beauty – and that our proper response, on receiving such a gift, is to accept it with gratitude and thanksgiving. This is surely the distinctive characteristic of ourselves as human beings: humankind is not merely a logical or a political animal, but above all a “eucharistic animal,” capable of gratitude and endowed with the power to bless God for the gift of creation. Other animals express their gratefulness simply by being themselves, by living in the world in their own instinctive manner; but we human beings possess self-awareness, and so consciously and by deliberate choice we can thank God with eucharistic joy. Without such thanksgiving we are not truly human.

But what does Patriarch Dimitrios mean by the second word, ‘ascetic’? When we speak of asceticism, we think of such things as fasting, vigils and rigorous practices. That is indeed part of what is involved; but *askesis* signifies much more than this. It means that, in relation to the environment, we are to display what The *Philokalia* and other spiritual texts of the Orthodox Church call *enkrateia*, ‘self-restraint.’

That is to say, we are to practice a voluntary self-limitation in our consumption of food and natural resources. Each of us is called to make the crucial distinction between what we want and what we need. Only through such self-denial, through our willingness sometimes to forgo and to say ‘no’ or ‘enough’ will we rediscover our true human place in the universe.

The fundamental criterion for an environmental ethic is not individualistic or commercial. The acquisition of material goods cannot justify the self-centered desire to control the natural resources of the world. Greed and avarice render the world opaque, turning all things to dust and ashes. Generosity and unselfishness render the world transparent, turning all things into a sacrament of loving communion – communion between human beings with one another, communion between human beings and God.

*“We are to practice a voluntary self-limitation
in our consumption of food and natural resources.”*

This need for an ascetic spirit can be summed up in a single key word: sacrifice. This exactly is the missing dimension in our environmental ethos and ecological action.

We are all painfully aware of the fundamental obstacle that confronts us in our work for the environment. It is precisely this: how are we to move from theory to action, from words to deeds? We do not lack technical

scientific information about the nature of the present ecological crisis. We know, not simply what needs to be done, but also how to do it. Yet, despite all this information, unfortunately little is actually done. It is a long journey from the head to the heart, and an even longer journey from the heart to the hands.

How shall we bridge this tragic gap between theory and practice, between ideas and actuality? There is only one way: through the missing dimension of sacrifice. We are thinking here of a sacrifice that is not cheap but costly: 'I will not offer to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing' (2 Samuel 24:24). There will be an effective, transforming change in the environment if, and only if, we are prepared to make sacrifices that are radical, painful and genuinely unselfish. If we sacrifice nothing, we shall achieve nothing. Needless to say, as regards both nations and individuals, so much more is demanded from the rich than from the poor. Nevertheless, all are asked to sacrifice something for the sake of their fellow humans.

Sacrifice is primarily a spiritual issue and less an economic one. In speaking about sacrifice, we are talking about an issue that is not technological but ethical. Indeed, environmental ethics is specifically a central theme of this present symposium. We often refer to an environmental crisis; but the real crisis lies not in the environment but in the human heart. The fundamental problem is to be found not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the way we think.

The root cause of all our difficulties consists in human selfishness and human sin. What is asked of us is not greater technological skill but deeper repentance, *metanoia*, in the literal sense of the Greek word, which signifies 'change of mind.' The root cause of our environmental sin lies in our self-centeredness and in the mistaken order of values, which we inherit and accept without any critical evaluation. We need a new way of thinking about our own selves, about our relationship with the world and with God. Without this revolutionary 'change of mind,' all our conservation projects, however well-intentioned, will remain ultimately ineffective. For, we shall be dealing only with the symptoms, not with their cause. Lectures and international conferences may help to awaken our conscience, but what is truly required is a baptism of tears.

Speaking about sacrifice is unfashionable, and even unpopular in the modern world. But, if the idea of sacrifice is unpopular, this is primarily because many people have a false notion of what sacrifice actually means. They imagine that sacrifice involves loss or death; they see sacrifice as somber or gloomy. Perhaps this is because, throughout the centuries, religious concepts have been used to introduce distinctions between those who have and those who have not, as well as to justify avarice, abuse and arrogance.

But if we consider how sacrifice was understood in the Old Testament, we find that the Israelites had a totally different view of its significance. To them, sacrifice meant not loss, but gain; not death, but life. Sacrifice was costly, but it brought about not diminution, but fulfillment; it was a change, not for the worse, but for the better. Above all, for the Israelites, sacrifice signified not primarily giving up but simply giving. In its basic essence, a sacrifice is a gift – a voluntary offering in worship by humanity to God.

*"Sacrifice: the missing dimension in our
environmental ethos and ecological action."*

Thus in the Old Testament, although sacrifice often involved the slaying of an animal, the whole point was not the taking but the giving of life; not the death of the animal but the offering of the animal's life to God. Through this sacrificial offering, a bond was established between the human worshiper and God. The gift, once accepted by God, was consecrated, acting as a means of communion between Him and His people. For the Israelites, the fasts – and the sacrifices that went with them – were 'seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals' (Zechariah 8:19).

An essential element of any sacrifice is that it should be willing and voluntary. That which is extracted from us by force and violence, against our will, is not a sacrifice. Only what we offer in freedom and in love is truly a

sacrifice. There is no sacrifice without love. When we surrender something unwillingly, we suffer loss; but when we offer something voluntarily, out of love, we only gain.

When, on the fortieth day after Christ's birth, His mother the Virgin Mary, accompanied by Joseph, came to the temple and offered her child to God, her act of sacrifice brought her not sorrow but joy; for, it was an act of love. She did not lose her child, but He became her own in a way that He could never otherwise have been.

Christ proclaimed this seemingly contradictory mystery when He taught: *'Whosoever wishes to save his life must lose it'* (Matt. 10.39; 16.25). When we sacrifice our life and share our wealth, we gain life in abundance and enrich the entire world. Such is the experience of human kind over the ages: *Kenosis* means *plerosis*; voluntary self-emptying brings self-fulfillment.

All this we need to apply to our work for the environment. There can be no salvation for the world, no healing, no hope of a better future, without the missing dimension of sacrifice. Without a sacrifice that is costly and uncompromising, we shall never be able to act as priests of the creation in order to reverse the descending spiral of ecological degradation.

The path that lies before us, as we continue on our spiritual voyage of ecological exploration, is strikingly indicated in the ceremony of the Great Blessing of the Waters, performed in the Orthodox Church on January 6th, the Feast of Theophany, when we commemorate Christ's Baptism in the Jordan River. The Great Blessing begins with a hymn of praise to God for the beauty and harmony of creation:

Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works. No words suffice to sing the praise of Thy wonders.... The sun sings Thy praises; the moon glorifies Thee; the stars supplicate before Thee; the light obeys Thee; the deeps are afraid at Thy presence; the fountains are Thy servants; Thou hast stretched out the heavens like a curtain; Thou hast established the earth upon the waters; Thou hast walled about the sea with sand; Thou hast poured forth the air that living things may breathe....

Then, after this all-embracing cosmic doxology, there comes the culminating moment in the ceremony of blessing. The celebrant takes a Cross and plunges it into the vessel of water (if the service is being performed indoors in church) or into the river or the sea (if the service takes place out of doors).

The Cross is our guiding symbol in the supreme sacrifice to which we are all called. It sanctifies the waters and, through them, transforms the entire world. Who can forget the imposing symbol of the Cross in the splendid mosaic of the Basilica of Saint Apollinare in Classe? As we celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Ravenna, our attention was focused on the Cross, which stood at the center of our heavenly vision, at the center of the natural beauty that surrounded it, and at the center of our celebration of heaven on earth.

Such is the model of our ecological endeavors. Such is the foundation of any environmental ethic. The Cross must be plunged into the waters. The Cross must be at the very center of our vision. Without the Cross, without sacrifice, there can be no blessing and no cosmic transfiguration.

Amen.

**His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios
Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Chairman of the Holy Eparchial Synod of Bishops
Encyclical for the Beginning of
the Ecclesiastical New Year 2002**

September 1, 2002

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons,
the Monks and Nuns, ... the Young Adults and Youth, the Hellenic Organizations,
and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America:

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with heartfelt joy in the Lord that I communicate with you at the beginning of a new ecclesiastical year.

Much like our natural world, our Church follows a cycle of growth and renewal, setting aside one day out of each liturgical year where we as Orthodox Christians mark new beginnings and define new challenges. ...

*“We bear a special obligation towards
protecting the natural environment and raising ecological awareness”*

Considering the importance of beginnings, it is not by accident that we designate... September 1 as a Day for the Protection of the Natural Environment. We recognize this immediate connection in the very first words of the book of Genesis, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). Reading the creation account further, we encounter a God who creates all things good and who bestows with endless love the gift of the natural environment to us human beings. Such an offering inspired the Psalmist to ponder: *“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him?”* (Psalm 8: 3-4)

As members of a technologically advanced society and as Orthodox faithful, we bear a special obligation towards protecting the natural environment and raising ecological awareness. On a global level our Orthodox Church offers Her prophetic and redemptive voice towards this end. The many ecological initiatives of our Ecumenical Patriarchate speak to this contribution, the most recent being a seaborne symposium on the Adriatic Sea this past June where scientists, religious leaders, and policy-makers from around the world met address growing environmental concerns affecting this body of water.

*“The commitment of our Orthodox
Church to protecting the environment
must also be a part of the local ministry of our parishes.”*

The commitment of our Orthodox Church to protecting our environment must also be a part of the local ministry of our parishes. On this day, September 1, we are called, as members of the Body of Christ, to address the needs of our own communities concerning the environment. We are challenged to behold with sensitivity the state of the natural world and to respond decisively when we witness the degradation of natural resources and the problems of increasing air and water pollution in our cities.

In the face of these and other challenges, we remember on this day that the natural environment is a freely given gift from God, and we reaffirm our responsibility to act as stewards of His creation, offering back to God the same precious gifts which He has so lovingly given to us. In so doing, we pray that we may be imparted the Divine wisdom to behold how *“the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.”* (Psalm 19: 1).

May we mark the beginning of this ecclesiastical New Year with a renewed dedication to our natural environment, and may the infinite mercies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with all of you.

With paternal love in Christ,
++DEMETRIOS, Archbishop of America

His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Amissos
Primate,
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church
Public Statement at The White House
Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives
Washington, DC
May 20, 2002

*And God saw every thing that he had made,
and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and
the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*

In the tradition of Orthodox Christianity, the Last Day of Creation – the Sixty Day, can never be separated from the First Day of Redemption – the Holy Friday (the sixth day of the week), on which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. One cannot be understood without the other.

Although God did create everything good, even “very good,” it was upon that same Sixth Day of Creation that the Book of Genesis tells us that the First-formed humans, Adam and Eve, separated themselves from their Creator and were exiled from Paradise into the “world.” And yet, it is on the Sixth Day of the week, Holy Friday, that our Lord Jesus Christ proclaims to the thief upon his cross, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Ecological sin is sin because it defaces God’s creation, even as sin defaces the image of God granted to every human person. In fact, personal sin, in its most ontological senses, precedes ecological sin, even as intention precedes action.

Orthodox Christians see the world as belonging to God, and being under the stewardship of human persons. And we shall give an account for our stewardship. As the human persons are redeemed from sin and brought to life in the light of God’s love, so shall the world be set aright, even as the Apostle Paul writes:

Creation waits breathless, eagerly expecting the unveiling of the sons and daughters of God. For the Creation has been subjected to vanity – and not of its own volition, but owing to Him who subjected it, in the hope that this same Creation might also be set free from the slavery of corruption, loosed into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Indeed, we know that right now, the whole Creation groans with us, even sharing the pangs of our new birth. And not only this, but even those who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, and we ourselves, we groan deep within as we await our adoption, the redemption of our physical bodies (Romans 8:19-23).

So the human person and the created world are inextricably intertwined, even dependent on one another. Since the first and ultimate purposes of humankind are to love (both God and our neighbor as ourselves), then it is only in the context of this love that we shall be able to discover the ways and means to find healing for the natural world, as well as the proper, spiritual and eucharistic/meditative use of the created order.

“The human person and the created world are inextricably intertwined, even dependent on one another. Since the first and ultimate purpose of humankind is to love (both God and neighbor as ourselves), it is only in the context of this love that we shall discover the ways and means to find healing for the natural world...”

The human person is created to be the mediator of creation, the bridge between the spiritual and material world. It is in the very composite nature of the human person that this transcendent function is imbedded. Although contrary to a secular point of view, the solutions to the ecological failures of the

modern age are found in a spiritual methodology. In other words, a failure of love separated the reality of the human person from living in the created world as in a Paradise, and it is only through the triumph of love – the Love Incarnate that hung upon the Holy Cross – that readmits us into the possibility of gaining Paradise again.

**Declaration on Environment Signed by Pope and Patriarch of Constantinople
“God Has Not Abandoned the World”**

Joint declaration signed 10 June 2002 by Patriarch Bartholomeos and Pope John Paul II on the shared Christian responsibility to safeguard the environment.

We are gathered here today in the spirit of peace for the good of all human beings and for the care of creation. At this moment in history, at the beginning of the third millennium, we are saddened to see the daily suffering of a great number of people from violence, starvation, poverty, and disease. We are also concerned about the negative consequences for humanity and for all creation resulting from the degradation of some basic natural resources such as water, air and land, brought about by an economic and technological progress which does not recognize and take into account its limits.

Almighty God envisioned a world of beauty and harmony, and He created it, making every part an expression of His freedom, wisdom and love (cf. Gen 1:1-25).

At the center of the whole of creation, He placed us, human beings, with our inalienable human dignity. Although we share many features with the rest of the living beings, Almighty God went further with us and gave us an immortal soul, the source of self-awareness and freedom, endowments that make us in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-31; 2:7). Marked with that resemblance, we have been placed by God in the world in order to cooperate with Him in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation.

At the beginning of history, man and woman sinned by disobeying God and rejecting His design for creation. Among the results of this first sin was the destruction of the original harmony of creation. If we examine carefully the social and environmental crisis which the world community is facing, we must conclude that we are still betraying the mandate God has given us: to be stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom.

God has not abandoned the world. It is His will that His design and our hope for it will be realized through our cooperation in restoring its original harmony. In our own time we are witnessing a growth of an ecological awareness which needs to be encouraged, so that it will lead to practical programs and initiatives. An awareness of the relationship between God and humankind brings a fuller sense of the importance of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, which is God’s creation and which God entrusted to us to guard with wisdom and love (cf. Gen 1:28).

Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity. It is on the basis of our recognition that the world is created by God that we can discern an objective moral order within which to articulate a code of environmental ethics. In this perspective, Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in ecological awareness, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of

unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act.

First, we must regain humility and recognize the limits of our powers, and most importantly, the limits of our knowledge and judgment. We have been making decisions, taking actions, and assigning values that are leading us away from the world as it should be, away from the design of God for creation, away from all that is essential for a healthy planet and a healthy commonwealth of people. A new approach and a new culture are needed, based on the centrality of the human person within creation and inspired by environmentally ethical behavior stemming from our triple relationship to God, to self, and to creation. Such an ethics fosters interdependence and stresses the principles of universal solidarity, social justice, and responsibility, in order to promote a true culture of life.

Secondly, we must frankly admit that humankind is entitled to something better than what we see around us. We and, much more, our children and future generations are entitled to a better world, a world free from degradation, violence and bloodshed, a world of generosity and love.

Thirdly, aware of the value of prayer, we must implore God the Creator to enlighten people everywhere regarding the duty to respect and carefully guard creation.

We therefore invite all men and women of good will to ponder the importance of the following ethical goals:

1. To think of the world's children when we reflect on and evaluate our options for action.
2. To be open to study the true values based on the natural law that sustain every human culture.
3. To use science and technology in a full and constructive way, while recognizing that the findings of science have always to be evaluated in the light of the centrality of the human person, of the common good, and of the inner purpose of creation. Science may help us to correct the mistakes of the past, in order to enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the present and future generations. It is love for our children that will show us the path that we must follow into the future.
4. To be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity. Our mortality and our weakness of judgment together warn us not to take irreversible actions with what we choose to regard as our property during our brief stay on this earth. We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation, we are only stewards of the common heritage.
5. To acknowledge the diversity of situations and responsibilities in the work for a better world environment. We do not expect every person and every institution to assume the same burden. Everyone has a part to play, but for the demands of justice and charity to be respected the most affluent societies must carry the greater burden, and from them is demanded a sacrifice greater than can be offered by the poor. Religions, governments, and institutions are faced by many different situations; but on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity all of them can take on some tasks, some part of the shared effort.
6. To promote a peaceful approach to disagreement about how to live on this earth, about how to share it and use it, about what to change and what to leave unchanged. It is not our desire to evade controversy about the environment, for we trust in the capacity of human reason and the path of dialogue to reach agreement. We commit ourselves to respect the views of all who disagree with us, seeking solutions through open exchange, without resorting to oppression and domination.

It is not too late. God's world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future. Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing.

John Paul II
Bartholomeos I
10 June 2002

Protocol No. 756 (September 1st, 2002 A.D.)

Bartholomaios, by the Mercy of God, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch to the Entire Plentitude of the Church, Grace and Peace from the Creator of the Whole Creation, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Our beloved brothers and sons and daughters in the Lord,

When in the year 1990 we declared from the Mother Church the First of September of each year as a day of prayer for the environment, it was not envisioned how soon natural conditions would deteriorate on account of harmful human interference and how horrific the losses and damages on human lives resulting from them would be. The recent floods in Europe, India and Russia, as well as those proceeding during the current year and the previous ones in various other parts of the earth, bear witness to the disturbance of the climatic conditions caused by the overheating of the atmosphere of our planet. These disasters have persuaded even the most incredulous persons that the problem is real, that the cost of repairing its damages is comparable to the cost of preventing them, and that there is no margin left anymore for continuing to remain quiet.

The Orthodox Church, being a pioneer in her love and interest for humanity and its living conditions, on the one hand, recommends to us to live virtuous lives, looking for eternal life in the world beyond, heaven, but on the other hand, she does not forget that according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, our virtue will not be assessed on the basis of individualistic criteria, but on the basis of applied solidarity, as this is so characteristically described in the parable of the future Judgment. According to this parable, the criterion for accepting one among those saved who inherit the Eternal Kingdom, is the supply of food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, aid to the sick, sympathy to the prisoners and generally the offering to our fellow human beings the possibility to live in our planet under normal conditions and to come to know God so that they too may enter into His Kingdom. This means that the protection of our fellow human beings from destructive floods, fires, storms, tempests and other such disasters is our bounding duty; and consequently, that failure to take appropriate measures for avoiding such phenomena is chargeable to us as an unpaid debt and constitutes a crime of negligence, which incurs a plethora of other crimes, such as the death of innocent people, the destruction of cultural monuments and property as well as regressive progress.

We pray to God to remove natural destructions, which we cannot avert by our own care and foresight, but at the same time, it is our bounding duty to engage in the labor of study and the expense of taking necessary measures for avoiding those disasters that are derived from bad human action.

It is true that a great part of these measures and expenditures cannot be taken from isolated individuals because they go beyond their capabilities. Sometimes, they even go beyond the capabilities of individual states and require inter-state collaboration and even cooperation of the entirety of the human community. Thus, we heartily salute the international consultations on this matter which are taking place or will take place and wish them to conclude their deliberations with unanimous decisions on the measures that should be taken and on their implementation.

Nevertheless, the greatest part of the contributions to the creation of this crises is due to the excessive waste of energy by isolated individuals. Thus, the restriction of this wasteful consumption will blunt the acuteness of the problem, while the constant increase in the use of renewable sources of energy will intermittently contribute to its alleviation. However insignificant the contribution of every individual to the averting of new catastrophic natural phenomena may appear, we are all obliged to do as individuals whatever we can, because only then we shall be able to pray to God boldly to supply what is lacking in our own efforts and possibilities.

Hence, we paternally urge everyone to come to the realization of their personal responsibility and do whatever they can to avert the increase of the temperature on the earth and the aggravation of environmental conditions. We pray fervently to God that He should look favorably on the common effort of all and prevent other threatening disasters on our natural environment, within which He ordered us to live and to fight the good fight in order that we enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.