

Practical Ecological Responses

Developing a Parish Environmental Ministry

1. Getting Started – The Role of the Priest

by Fred Krueger

Our first task is to raise the consciousness of adults who most use the resources and gifts of the planet.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

How many of our Orthodox clergy are prepared to assume leadership on issues concerning the environment?

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

The process of beginning a parish environmental ministry is simple. It begins with the priest, and from his example it spreads into the parish. The journey into a right relationship to God's creation is essentially an extension of the life of the Church into the life of the world. This journey involves the development of a more comprehensive application of Christian faith. The steps in this journey are described in detail below.

“To get started, the priest prays to be in alignment with Jesus Christ and the voice and will of the Church...”

The first step: The priest starts with himself. He prays to be in right alignment with our Lord Jesus Christ and the voice and will of the Church as it deals with God's creation. A right understanding of ecological responsibility begins in the Scriptures and continues through the writings of the saints. It comes into clarity and focus with the voice of the Orthodox patriarchs who are speaking with one voice about the importance of ecological awareness. This is not some new teaching. This is an application of Biblical mandates and the cosmological understanding of the saints and fathers about creation. In our day these are more important than ever before because the human ability to alter the face of the world is powerfully amplified through science and technology.

The striving for a right relationship to creation has been with us since the beginning, but it is now clearly enunciated through the inspired teaching of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. No one has spoken more incisively or more comprehensively about Christian responsibility to care for the earth and its life than His All-Holiness.

The priest studies and integrates these foundational sources of Church authority. He particularly discerns the overarching vision that drives ecological ministry. This vision, simply put, is that Christ and the Holy Spirit fill all things. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us of this awareness. The liturgical life of the church repeatedly declares it. Now the actions of parishioners must acknowledge this reality through respect for God's creation. This is the vision that guides the priest's behavior so that respect for our Lord and the Holy Spirit fill his actions.

“The heart of the ecological vision of the Orthodox Church is Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit filling all of God's creation.”

Here is a quick review of the pillars that support this vision. In prayers we repeatedly declare, “O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things....” This prayer summarizes our vision. This states that we serve Christ in many ways, but those ways include the very nature of creation and our shaping of it so that it may more fully serve God and neighbor.

Our prayers also declare, “Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven...*” Read this last phrase carefully. This is spiritual direction. The Fathers are clear about this phrase. It means we are to look to heaven and discern its pattern there so that we can manifest that same holy pattern here in the material world. (See, for example, the Commentary of Saint John Chrysostom on the “Our Father” – in Matt. 6:10). This provides further spiritual direction as we are to seek the ways of heaven – love, harmony, integration, blessing, beauty, harmlessness, service, peace among other virtues and qualities – and we are to bring these qualities into the ways we live upon the earth.

In both the New and Old Testaments, there is a repeating refrain that declares, “The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof....” Saint Paul also cites this in his First Letter to the Corinthians (10:26). We hear this in the Psalms and in other books of the Old Testament. This phrase emphasizes that creation is first the Lord's. This provides perspective on modern suppositions about human ownership of the world. Several corollaries follow. First, we are not owners, but stewards of God's creation. Second, we are caretakers of all that the Lord has placed into our keeping. Third, we are to act on behalf of the common good for those in our parishes, but also for the good of all those in

our city and the larger global community. These passages frame and introduce our mission and ecological purpose in the world.

“The parish priest teaches more potently by what he is and does than by what he says.”

A right alignment of vision, attitude and behavior with the Church are crucial for the priest because he teaches more potently by what he is and does than by what he says. He sacrifices himself and becomes a model for the faithful, following Jesus Christ. His prayer for right relationship with the Church is crucial and must be reaffirmed daily. This prayer, coupled with integrity in his ecological striving, will invoke the Holy Spirit and bring a chain of ecological insights, inspiration and practices to his parish ministry.

The second step in this focus on the priest is Repentance. The repentance to which we are called is not only of personal failures, but of the errors and lies and even the hidden sins that are integrated into the design of the consumer-oriented secular world. We are to embrace those things which are of Christ, and therefore those actions which bring healing, beauty, and community to the parish and the larger population. This means we seek frugality, harmlessness, quality durable goods, and respect for the life of the world. In particular we are seeking a certain kind of cultural repentance, a repentance that distances ourselves from those tendencies and habits in the surrounding culture that defile the individual and degrade the larger community.

“Recycling... is basic to a Christian attitude toward the world.”

One of the first assumptions to examine comes from the concept of trash. The Scriptures speak of replenishing and renewing the earth. We are not to trash the earth or add to its defilement or degradation. Recycling therefore is basic to a Christian attitude toward the world. Recycling means that we put back what we take from creation. We are to build up the world, not drag it down by endless consumption which depletes and drains the world. Recycling addresses the throw-away mentality that cheapens our sense of the world and degrades its fruitfulness. A replenishment mentality restores a sacred sensitivity about the materials we use from the earth. It implies a reciprocal relationship between taking and giving, between receiving and returning. We may take from the earth, but we must also give back in proportion to what we take. This leads to a deeper sense of sharing what we have with others so that all things might be reused. Along with recycling, we should include the related concepts of restoring, reducing, re-using and repairing to guide parish attitudes toward the world.

The third step in preparation for getting started is to let this comprehensive orientation toward Christ and Creation extend into the parish. For this step the priest prays for blessing and inspiration upon the parish that all might see the pathway to its “greening.” In this regard he can understand this term “greening” as those attitudes and actions which align with Jesus Christ as a striving to discern and anticipate the ways of the New Earth while we yet dwell in this time of turmoil and travail.

He prays to discern the person (or persons) who might help form a parish “Ministry of Creation Care.” He can issue a call for volunteers or simply invite those individuals who might be appropriate. The task of this committee is to discern ways that will help bring parish behavior into alignment with the call of the Church and the specific ecological practices that fit the circumstances of the parish.

These initial steps plant a spiritual foundation for ecological action in both the pastor and the mind of the parish. This establishes an interior attitude and atmosphere within the parish of receptivity to ecological ministry. Once this foundation is established, the priest, in submission to the Call of the Church, can initiate the parish’s ministry of ecology and commission it to grow in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ toward a more sustainable way of living.

*“The foundation for a successful parish
Ministry of Ecology lies in the Scriptures,
in the teachings of the saints, and in the
living voice of the Church.”*

It is important that the priest establishes personal practice in his own life before beginning to teach about creation care to the parish. This is crucial because the parish will replicate what the priest is more than what he says. If ecologically sensitive practice is not in the priest, it will not root in the parish or its members. Any failure of spiritual or ecological striving in the priest will inevitably transfer to the parish and will show up in the behavior of parishioners. This is a crucial key for a vigorous parish ministry of ecology. If problems arise in this ministry, the solution is simple. The priest starts with himself and seeks integrity with God and the Call of the Church on ecology. A genuine striving for integrity will then transfer over into the parish and its members.

Once these foundational steps have been taken and a striving for a right relationship toward God’s creation established in the priest, then the pastor is finally ready to announce and convene the first meeting of the new parish Creation Care ministry (or environmental committee).

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2. Forming a Parish Creation Care Ministry

How many of our Orthodox parishes and communities are prepared to materialize the knowledge that we have accumulated by practicing ecologically-sensitive principles?

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

The commitment of our Orthodox Church to protecting the environment must also be a part of the local ministry of our parishes.... We bear a special obligation towards protecting the natural environment and raising ecological awareness.

- HE Archbishop Demetrios
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

The pastor identifies a coordinator or liaison person who will participate in the parish creation care ministry. This individual should have an easy rapport with the pastor and be able to provide communication between the parish council and the new Ministry of Creation Care. It will be most helpful if this coordinator already has familiarity with ecological concern and is supportive of this activity.

The priest announces the formation of this new ministry and allows individuals to volunteer for participation. Young people in high school or college might be included in its membership as they are often more astute and sensitive to ecological opportunities and its rationale than their parents.

“...high school and college students can be included in the parish ministry group.”

The name of this group might simply be the Creation Care Ministry. This is because we are dealing with God’s creation and are commanded to care for the earth in the same manner as our Lord Jesus Christ would care for it. Creation care is a more

accurate term than a Ministry of Ecology because the concept of creation implies a Creator God. In contrast the concept of ecology does not convey this connection nor does it remind us that we are dealing with God's gift of the earth.

Once a coordinator is identified, the priest, together with those who will be part of the new ministry of creation, schedules the first meeting. Notice that the priest lines up participation before the first meeting is announced. This helps bolster attendance and makes the meeting a significant initial event. Allow at least several weeks between the announcement of the meeting and the actual meeting. During the interim continue to promote the gathering. Repetition is important.

“The new ministry of ecology group should spend some time examining the Orthodox theological foundations for care of God’s creation.”

At this first gathering, the pastor provides the rationale for this new ministry to those attending. His commentary should remind the group about the connection of this ministry to the vision of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit everywhere present in creation. This maintains a tight connection between the work of the committee and the larger work of the Church. To place this Ministry on a solid footing, the members of the committee should acquaint themselves with the Church's theology of creation. This means education on the Orthodox theology of creation.

A good beginning point for the committee is a review of the statements by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on Orthodox Christian responsibility for the earth. The members might also acquaint themselves with the writings of the saints and the relevant passages in Scripture. These foundational sources explain the importance of this ministry and the vision and attitudes that must be cultivated. For most parishioners there is a lot to learn here as the Orthodox theology of creation has not been well taught in most parishes. Once there is clarity about the theology, a lively discussion can begin regarding the implications and the implementation of this message. There is a great depth of insight in these materials. Essentially the ministry group is learning how and why we are extending the life of the Church into the life of the world.

Let the new ministry group determine the frequency of meetings. Initially, they will find it more helpful to focus on learning what the Church has to say than examining what to do. The first several months are a time of orientation to the Orthodox theology of creation. This will help them distinguish between Orthodox Creation Care and mere environmentalism. Creation care is a ministry and service to God and neighbor that is necessary for this time. In contrast, environmentalism may understand science, but have little acknowledgment of God or Christian morality. The committee's task is to discern the moral and ethical implications of Orthodox theology to lifestyle and propose recommendations on the behavior of the parish.

Every meeting of the Ministry of Creation Care should begin with prayer and include the “Our Father” before discussion begins. This prayer is highly ecological because it explicitly invokes the will of God, that it be done “*on earth as it is in heaven.*” This provides us with a mandate to reflect on heaven as a guide to how we are to live on the earth. If we follow this guidance, then He gives us our daily bread as well as inspiration and everything else that we need.

It should be noted that the patriarchs and many hierarchs of the Church are eloquent and insightful in their call to the Church to initiate a vigorous response to the ecological ills of the world. Select one of their writings, perhaps only a paragraph or two, at each session and discuss its implications. This study of their writings will initiate a journey of discovery that will make it absolutely clear that we are called to transform and transfigure the earth and human society so that we become witnesses to right Christian livelihood. This regular examination of the theological foundations for ecological action will, over time, eliminate any confusion about why the parish is called to act on behalf of God’s creation. Then questions about how we are to apply the invitation of our bishops to engage creation care will fit into a theological and spiritual context that is clear and relevant.

This first meeting is easy. The priest calls for the formation of a creation care ministry. He commissions those who will participate to study the theology that leads into creation care. He invites those attending to apply their findings to the local parish and to make recommendations as to what can be done that reflects Orthodox theology and the needs of society. Each member of this creation care ministry should be committed to the goal. Those who cannot grasp the concept or who do not understand why we care for the earth should not participate in the building of this ministry.

*“The Ministry of Creation Care is
both a journey of discovery.... and an
opportunity to live a more consciously
Christian way of life.”*

When assembling this Ministry team, it will be helpful to remember that the ministry of creation is a journey. The theology of creation care is simple, but also deep and profound. Prayer, study, discussion, sacrifice and lifestyle change are all implied. An opportunity emerges to live a more conscientiously Christian lifestyle that will bring enhanced joy, fulfillment, and more abundant blessing into the life of the parish and the home. But it will take a good deal of effort and work.

After two or three months of study, the Ministry of Creation Care should be given the task of making a few initial recommendations on how to align the physical operation and behavior of the parish with the implications of a sacred creation.

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3. Dialogue within the Ministry Group

How do the decisions of any local community and parish reflect on a practical and tangible level the experience that we have gained on a theoretical level? In an age when information is readily available, there is surely no excuse for ignorance or indifference.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

The first task of the Creation Care ministry group is education. The members of the Creation Care Ministry group will need to study the Orthodox theology of creation and extend that understanding to the actions of the parish and issues of lifestyle. They will encounter situations that require the weighing of moral principles alongside scientific, economic, and spiritual considerations. Some situations will be easy and clear; others may require study, prayer, and reflection. To meet this challenge, the members of the Creation Care Ministry group need clear guidelines on their interaction and discussion. This means that the pastor should institute a “rule” for discussions.

“The members of the Creation Care Ministry group need clear guidelines for right interactions and discussions.”

All meetings open with prayer. All discussion should be informed by our Christian striving. A code for dialogue emerges that can bring the inspiration of the Holy Spirit into discussions. All discourse will be respectful, serious, and seeking of what is right before God. Ministry members commit to the elimination of all negativity from their conversation. They avoid criticism of any person’s perspective. Every ministry member should seek to discern the Holy Spirit in each other. Each should expect fresh inspiration as a result of the synergies in discussion. When uncertainty arises, questions should draw out insights rather than critical comments. The committee functions best when it strives to assume a monastic attitude of holy regard and respect toward every participant. This rule will bring sobriety and fresh inspiration into the ministry group so that its insights are more than the sum total of knowledge present within the group.

If this rule is followed, inspiration and surprisingly creative ideas will emerge from the discussions. New ideas for addressing lifestyle issues will arise; problems of youth migration will be addressed; inspired change can pour into the parish. New people will show up, drawn by the search for ways to address the pressing issues of society.

A historical note is pertinent. After Rome fell in the latter half of the fifth century, the Church held society together in the West. It was the Church that provided stability and vision for the future through its spiritual direction. The saints and hierarchs together with the clergy foresaw the changes that lay ahead and prepared the Church and its parishioners. The Church flourished despite the traumas of the time and a new stability gradually emerged that led to the Middle Ages.

“The challenge of the Creation Care Ministry group is not just ecology... It represents a mandate is to build an Orthodox way of life.”

In our day the patriarchs of the Church are speaking with one voice about the need to address ecological problems. They speak of the need to exemplify solutions to these problems by changing how we live. Through their vision and spiritual direction, the members of the parish Creation Care Ministry group should discern the principles that follow from their teachings and make recommendations to the Parish Council on parish behavior. Every aspect of life and structure should be scrutinized. Essentially this is the application of Orthodox theology to lifestyle and culture.

One of the more vexing problems facing the Orthodox Church in the West has involved the disconnection between Church theology and the assumptions of secular society. The Orthodox Church has sought to instill good “wheat seeds” into its young people and members, but the “weed seeds” of secularism and materialism have often overwhelmed members, causing them to fall away from parish life. By addressing lifestyle questions, the parish is extending the life of the Church into the life of the world. In the process it is restoring an Orthodox way of life, not according to the pattern of the Old World, but according to what fits today’s world.

The challenge of the Creation Care Ministry group is not just ecology. Its mandate is to place Christ at the center of our lives and build a way of life that honors God, that does no harm to neighbors, that serves one another, and that conveys a sacred view of life in Creation to all its members. All of Creation is permeated with the holy presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we could not say, *“...Who art everywhere present and fillest all things.”*

Dialogue within the ministry group is not restricted to matters theological or ecological. If a tangential topic relates to the parish or the local area, include it in the discussion. Seek out the values that underlie perspectives on issues. Every determination

of the creation care group is laden with values and moral implications. The ministry group should be alert to the values that underlie its recommendations.

It should be emphasized that the character of dialogue in this Ministry group is different from a business meeting. Members cultivate an attitude of respect for one another. A goal is to reach beyond the sum total of insights and to acquire inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This will bring a blessed synergy to raise the group into new insights and perceptions that are greater than the sum of knowledge within the members. This is a spiritual art that can only be learned by prayer, practice, patience, and perseverance.

*“Every Ministry meeting has a facilitator.
The facilitator oversees the agenda, but
exercises a special spiritual function....”*

Every Ministry group meeting should have a facilitator. The facilitator is more than the meeting chair who oversees and presents the agenda. This is because the facilitator holds a special spiritual function. Even after the opening prayer which the pastor or his designated representative gives to start the meeting, the facilitator silently prays and blesses each participant in Christ. The meeting facilitator may ask pertinent questions, but this person’s primary task is to ensure that the meeting focus and these guidelines (which might be called a “Christian protocol for dialogue”) are maintained.

Some additional features of the rule for proper Christian dialogue include the following: Respect every person. Hold no grudges or animosities. Forgive one another (you can do this quietly). Make an intentional effort to recall that each person is in the image of God and striving toward that likeness.

*“Participants follow a disciplined spiritual
protocol which maintains group unity despite
difficult questions. No negativity is allowed.”*

Avoid all negativity. Do not allow disagreements or dissension to enter a meeting. Draw one another out through questions rather than declarations. Avoid political responses to questions. We seek the view of Jesus Christ which is above and beyond political affiliation, cultural norms, or social status.

Seek to discern the touch of the Holy Spirit in discussions. As you expect the highest and best from each other, this supposition draws out a higher level of dialogue from the group. This expectation is a way that one can serve without speaking.

A task of the facilitator is to maintain this decorum so that the meeting flows almost as an extension of worship. The facilitator speaks minimally and should never dominate discussion. If someone forgets these requirements, the facilitator gently reminds the group of the need to observe the rule for right dialogue and decorum. Right attitude is more important than the specific content of comments.

Participants should keep comments brief and to the point. Each person should avoid grandstanding or long soliloquies. Participants strive to bring personal discipline to these discussions. Along with the avoidance of negativity, do not dwell on all the environmental problems. Rather seek solutions.

If these guidelines for Christian dialogue are followed, the meetings will be profitable and filled with productive insights that will aid in the greening of the parish.

Once these attitudes are in place, the Creation Care Ministry group is ready to examine specific issues and make proposals to the pastor and/or the parish council. It is also ready to undertake the journey of learning about the Orthodox doctrines of creation and human responsibility to live within the natural boundaries established by God and the carrying capacity of the earth.

“This Creation Care Ministry group makes recommendations to the pastor and Parish Council; it also shares its insights on a regular basis so that an education of the parish results.”

This Creation Care Ministry group studies the foundations for an Orthodox theology of creation, examines practical considerations, and makes recommendations to the pastor and Parish Council. Either the group facilitator or an appointed liaison from the Creation Care Ministry group should submit its recommendations. Regular communications should take place between this committee and the Parish Council so that the theological insights from the ministry group are communicated to parish council members. In this way the study and the education of the Creation Care Ministry are shared and passed on to the larger parish.

Finally, if a situation arises in which someone in the parish disagrees with these principles, don't argue. Rather, point out that the person is disagreeing, not with you or this ministry group, but with the Scriptures, the Saints, and the Call of the Church. Our first duty is to obey God and the statutes which were handed to us in antiquity. Even though those mandates have not always been carefully observed or taught, now we are called to relearn their relevance and obey them.

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4. How to Teach a Theology of Creation

We challenge each Church and religious community to educate its own members through preaching, teaching and example. They should encourage men and women of faith actively to participate in the work of environmental justice whatever their walk of life.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
Halki, June 1997

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

- HE Archbishop Lazar
British Columbia, December, 1989

The key to teaching an Orthodox Christian understanding of God's creation lies in our vision of Christ and the Holy Spirit, *"everywhere present and filling all things."* Following this vision, we teach that we live and move and have our being in God, and that God lives in us. Similarly Christ is in creation and creation is in Christ.

"As we teach an Orthodox view of God's creation, we are at the same time repairing the consequences of the theological errors of the western past."

This may seem elementary, but it is crucial because this vision is the missing element in the Western Church – and in the mentality of the secular environmental movement. Western society has been formed by the materialistic forces of the Enlightenment, and before that by the Protestant Reformation, and the earlier split in the 11th century from the Eastern Church and the traditional theology of apostolic Christianity. The implication is important: as we teach the Orthodox vision of ecology,

i.e., a right relationship to God's creation, we are also repairing the consequences of the theological errors of the past which have led society to the brink of massive disaster.

The rise of the secular worldview

The world view in the Protestant lands of the West, despite minor variations, is that God is up in heaven and removed from the earth. This is why during the latter stages of the Protestant "reformation," the sacraments were excised from their services. This happened because John Calvin supposed that if God was up in heaven, then He was not down here on earth. The world therefore was barren of any spiritual power except for those times and places in which God chose to intervene. In his mind, sacraments could only be symbolic and had no genuine effect in the world.

The consequences of this error are valuable to trace because they show how deeply the loss of spiritual vision has penetrated the western mind and divorced civil society from God. This progression begins with Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who is considered the Father of Modern Science. He seized upon Calvin's concept of a separation between God and the world and premised two separate and distinct realms of knowledge, one heavenly and the other material. In relying upon this presumption in Calvin, Bacon gave society materialist assumptions about the world. His denial of God's presence in creation set science on a journey into materialism which separated God from people and nature, at least in popular assumptions. In his book *New Atlantis*, Bacon claimed that the basis for his new scientific method lay in a "separation of the Word of God from the works of God." By this action, Bacon saw that his method would "establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race over the universe." Now it would be possible, he wrote, to separate oneself from nature and, acting as a neutral observer, amass "objective knowledge" about the world. With behavioral knowledge so acquired, Bacon discerned a means to have "the power to conquer and subdue nature and shake her to her foundations." At the same time, he introduced the previously unthinkable concept of "warfare against nature." Nature was to be "bound into service," made a "slave," and "put in constraint."

René Descartes (1596-1650) elaborated upon Bacon's concept and proposed an innovative cosmology in which creation is a vast machine run according to mechanical principles. Descartes was a mathematician. He believed that nature and all existence operated according to mechanical principles, and that mathematical formulas were at the foundation of this machine-like universe. Descartes' mechanistic world view further stripped nature of its aliveness and mystery. He reduced the world and all its creatures from qualities rooted in the image of God to cold mathematical quantities of time, space and matter, leaving humanity with only a rational and calculable domain.

While Bacon constructed a scientific methodology for the modern era, Descartes provided the world view. He replaced the traditional sacred view of the cosmos as the divine *economia* with a giant clockwork mechanism. In this new scheme, nature was deadened and turned into passive machine parts that could be set into motion only by

the introduction of energy from an outside source, the same way as a clock requires regular winding. This mechanical mode of thinking could be applied to everything, even plants, animals, and people. In this view all nature was inanimate, soulless, dead rather than alive. This was the view that would eventually predominate in the West. According to historian Jeremy Rifkin, as a result of this mechanistic view, a scientific detachment from nature arose because it was considered devoid of life and feeling. Landlords, merchants, industrialists and scientists could now rest with a good conscience because Descartes assured them that their mechanical manipulation and expropriation of nature was appropriate because it conformed “to the natural order of things.”

A further effect of Descartes was the division of knowledge into categories. The modern university follows this pattern in its separate “departments.” It follows that those who have been taught according to this fragmented Cartesian framework often fail to put the principles and elements of creation together, and so we inherit an artificial separation in the way many people, including pastors, often think about the world.

“American society has largely been built upon the assumptions of the Enlightenment and its separation of Christ from creation. This is a large measure of what has to be healed in our culture.”

Upon the foundation laid by Bacon and Descartes, but also Kepler, Galileo, and other early scientists, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) provided the science for the new cosmology in his laws of matter and motion. In Newton nature becomes quantities of mass, sizes, shapes and movements. By contrast, classical physics studied nature to understand its causes. In Newton human focus shifts from God to the order of nature itself, which he saw as mathematical principles in motion. Newton considered the goal of science to be discovery, and particularly descriptions of the mathematical order of nature. The legacy of Isaac Newton is a mechanistic “billiard ball” paradigm of creation. This is a worldview in which predictable laws of cause and effect govern all matter and motion. In Newtonian mechanics, the paths and velocities of each particle are the determining causes. Discover the initial paths, mass and velocities of particles and you hold the key to every subsequent action and reaction in the universe. You could in theory explain everything. Predestination becomes quite plausible in this worldview.

Newton’s “billiard ball” theory of causality provided the theoretical foundation for technological advancement. It also robbed the world of vitality and mystery. This development moved God further from creation. Nature was stripped of all sacred or spiritual qualities and nothing mattered except that which was capable of measurement.

The separation of God from nature and a mechanistic worldview began to spread into other areas. Adam Smith (1723-1790) borrowed from the Cartesian worldview and

premised that “an invisible hand ruled over the marketplace,” assuring the proper function of economic life. He likened this invisible hand to the mechanical pendulum of a clock, meticulously regulating supply and demand, and automatically assuring the proper balance between production and consumption of materials. He assumed that if the economy was left unencumbered by outside interference or regulation, the market would run like a perpetual motion machine. This concept still provides philosophical rationale for the commercial exploitation of land and people. Economists continue to view the economic process in Cartesian terms when they speak of a “market *mechanism*.” Adam Smith reduces the traditional divine *economia*, rooted in God, to land, labor and capital, and thereby lays the foundation for the development of a market economy. This eventually leads to industrialism, a world economic system, consumerism, corporate globalism, and modern environmental degradation.

What Adam Smith did for economics, John Locke did for land, private property, and politics. John Locke (1632-1704) believed that the creatures and materials which make up the earth had no intrinsic value, only utilitarian value. This is a further decline from the presence of Christ filling all things. Most American colonists, building on John Locke’s philosophy, considered stewardship of the land as equivalent to stewardship of capital. Under Lockean ethics, the owner could manage the land to increase capital in whatever way might be profitable. This assumption about land as private property and a commodity has led to today’s prevailing attitude which allows stripmining, clearcutting of forests, subdivisions, or whatever action will bring an owner the highest dollar return.

These pioneers of the modern mentality were only the beginning. Thousands of others amplified these assumptions to give us the modern materialistic worldview. Even before the seminal forces of the Reformation, the changes in western assumptions about the progression of the Holy Trinity shaped a revisionist view of power and human authority in the West. The lesson for parishes is that as we teach an Orthodox Christian worldview, we are also teaching a way to heal the spiritual errors that have led us to the social and environmental problems we now face. This does not mean that one must understand all of the details about the errors of the past. It only means that one should grasp what is right, holy and true. An implication is that as we heal the causes of the ecological predicament, we are also healing people who have been wounded by these errors and this can lead us, God willing, into a larger healing of the mind of the West.

*“Activities are particularly important
in helping young people to learn about
care for the earth.”*

The parish Ministry of Creation Care group can identify a variety of ways to teach Orthodox responsibility for God’s creation. The opportunities include classes, discussion groups, lectures, study of the Scriptures and the saints, a methodical study course and encouragement of the pastor to include more commentary in his sermons on

the principles that relate to the Orthodox vision of creation and the spiritual and moral implications for behavior.

Public classes are a good option for parishes. The priest or an appropriate designated person can present the Orthodox theology of creation, not only for parish members, but for those from the larger community. It is common knowledge among heterodox Christians that the Eastern Orthodox Church has far and away the most developed theology of creation. This is because it has retained a strong connection to the teachings of the fathers on creation as has His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and all of the other Orthodox patriarchs when they represent and teach that legacy. This presents the local parish with a unique opportunity to highlight this aspect of Orthodox theology as a healing message for the wider community. Posters and advertisements can be designed to invite those from other religious groups and even environmental organizations to these classes.

Discussion groups are also valuable. These can be focused around the statements and writings of our hierarchs, but also the saints, the Scriptures, or specific ecological issues. A wealth of resources are available and as much as these can be tapped, they can translate into an education of the parish and the larger community. A parish that skillfully utilizes these materials can discover new opportunities for growth.

Teaching Young People

Young people in the parish are often concerned about ecology. Activities are particularly important in helping them learn about care for the earth. Neighborhood clean-up efforts can symbolize the spiritual-material influence of the parish on the larger community. Trips into nature cultivate a sense of wonder that leads to humility. Nature walks are beneficial for children because they can describe how God works through creation. Planting a small parish garden can demonstrate the interaction between God's life in nature, human stewardship, and the way the elements of creation respond to produce living things which serve people as food. Tree planting represents hope for the future. Placing flowers around the parish grounds adds a touch of beauty which can be a reminder of the greater Beauty of which they are small reflections. Opportunities for teaching and demonstrating the Orthodox theology of creation are endless.

In teaching children, it is important to make continual connections between God, nature, proper human action and the quality of life that results. A first principle which is readily understood is that humans are charged by God to take good care of the earth as a gift from God. Through prayers, blessing, and the grace of God, augmented by our fidelity to His commandments, creation can be transformed and transfigured to reflect some measure of the heavenly realm.

Young children experience the world through their senses more than through philosophical concepts. They need the experience of watching worms wiggle above ground after a rain, looking closely at snowflakes and wondering how God made every

one of them different, or admiring rainbows, or looking closely at the leaves of a tree and noticing how they are similar, and yet still different. Just smelling different flowers can be an enjoyable and sometimes an inspiring and memorable adventure for children. When introducing the creation, the teachers must model respectful attitudes and behaviors – and appreciate the wonder of creation – as they will teach as much by the qualities they embody as by their words.

Once respectful attitudes about the earth are demonstrated, it is an easy step to show how it is our human responsibility to make extra effort to take good care of the air, the water, and the land and to ensure it is maintained free from pollution and degradation. A sense of restraint follows. Recycling also follows as this is simply putting back the things which we take from the earth so that it may be replenished, restored and reused. This is a fundamental human responsibility as it allows others to share in the use of those things that have passed through our use, but which belong first to God. Therefore we are responsible to foster replenishment and reuse of the things of creation and to avoid abuse. This applies not only to paper and glass, but to everything in our lives. Once this principle is established, it follows that we avoid those items which cannot be recycled and are designed to be discarded.

Children who are taught about the mysteries and beauties of God's creation often develop an enduring sense of wonder about the world. If they are to maintain that wonder into adulthood, they need adult guidance and positive examples of respect for the earth. Insights from science are fine, but it is more important to teach creation from the perspective of God and the saints. Science can tell us how the world works, but the Church teaches what is right, holy and good. We need both for an integrated moral and spiritual sense of how the world must function. Emphasis on the Orthodox vision of creation as everywhere filled with Christ and the Holy Spirit is crucial. Once this vision is in place, then young people and adults alike are prepared to reflect on the many opportunities to apply the teachings of the Church to right livelihood in the world. This provides young people with a solid foundation for appreciating the crucial role of the Church in their lives. This is important as it will give them stability into adulthood.

Nature encourages young people to slow down. In today's electronic culture, young people are surrounded by new forms of communication. This has the effect of accelerating their nervous system which makes it harder to develop feelings of empathy for the life around them or for the spiritual world. This happens because the electronic world cultivates a cerebral understandings of nature and deemphasizes the heart and feelings. This electrified mentality is culpable in retarding their ability to appreciate the Divine Liturgy or the services of the Church. They need to slow down to connect to the upliftment of these services. Time in nature is therefore essential for young people. This is a further reason why it is important to give children opportunities to marvel at the wondrous creation God has given us. Children need personal experience of God's creation. If we want our children to become good stewards of the earth, we must teach them to love the earth. We must help them keep alive an inborn sense of wonder and beauty. This requires that an adult mentor each one into an appreciation of the

connection between God and the life in nature. Every child needs some opportunity to participate in the adventure of discovering the joy, excitement and mystery of the world.

Psychological research affirms this understanding. Children who spend time in nature develop better observation skills, are more creative, concentrate better (including children with ADD), and have more advanced motor fitness, balance, coordination, and agility. Outdoor activities engage all their senses and help them develop spiritual and scientific inquiry. Interactions with nature fosters a respect for diverse life forms and produces a heightened sense of self worth. Conversely, children who are separated from nature are more likely to suffer from depression and obesity.

In teaching children, lead them along slowly, simply and gently so that they are reminded of the goodness of the world and human responsibility to take good care of it. The emphasis until they are roughly twelve years old should be on beauty, goodness, loving creation, and keeping it clean and blessed. Children under that age should not be introduced to difficult issues of animal extinctions, global climate disruption, saving the rainforests, or the toxic tainting of the food chain. These problems can overwhelm them and sometimes cause them to lose hope in the future. The premature introduction of these big issues leaves them with a feeling of helplessness and this decreases their ability to engage these mega-issues in the future. Before a child can learn to save creation, he or she must first be taught to love it and respect it.

Creation as a Teacher

Some of the best sources for teaching about the natural world comes from the saints. They have a marvelously developed commentary on nature. Their writings can serve as a source of powerful spiritual learning, including how to learn from nature. For the most part Orthodox spiritual practice has considered the practice of learning from nature as something for monastics, but not lay people. This is probably because the way that monastics engage the challenge of learning from creation is as solitaries. Their method requires advanced spiritual formation and high levels of *theosis*, qualities not often present in the parish. However experience with groups of lay people shows that lessons about God from creation are available to all people.

What is it then that can be learned from creation? Those who begin the journey of learning through creation find that the acquisition of the virtues – i.e., the initial steps on the ladder of spiritual formation – is what parish groups primarily learn. This is the bottom of the spiritual ladder, but it is often not taught because it is considered so elementary. But it is precisely the practice of the virtues that empowers care for creation and that leads to an appreciation of the depths of the Orthodox theology of creation. It also provides the mental and spiritual tools necessary to better participate in the liturgical life of the parish.

Because many Orthodox Christians are no longer familiar with what the saints teach about learning about God and spiritual formation through creation, here are some citations from their writings. The essential insights to gain from their comments are that there is an ability to learn spiritual truths from creation, that it is not difficult, that it cultivates a learning through personal experiences, and that it is complementary of everything else in Orthodox theology.

By adding awareness of the saints and their commentary about nature to the ministry of a parish, the parish can find new ways to teach about God and creation, and to highlight the theology of the Orthodox Church. Here are a few citations from several of the major figures, past and present, on the potential to learn from creation:

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it. The universal Church, moreover, throughout the whole world, has received this tradition from the apostles themselves.

Origen

There is a parallel between nature and Scripture that is so complete that we learn the same things from one source as the other. This is true because of a common origin in the Word of God. This explains why we must believe that the person who is asking questions of nature and the person who is asking questions of the Scriptures are bound to arrive at the same conclusions.

St. Anthony the Great

Once when a visiting philosopher asked how such a learned man as he got along in the desert without books. Anthony replied, “My book is the nature of created things, and as often as I have a mind to read the words of God, they are at my hand.”

St. Jerome

The desert fathers and mothers went to wild places to flee the corruption of cities, to wage war with their passions, but especially to encounter the holy.

St. Basil the Great

This marvelous creation is the supreme icon of Christian faith which leads to knowledge of the Supreme Artisan.

St. John Chrysostom

Indeed the magnitude and beauty of creation, and also the very manner of it, display a God Who is the artificer of the universe. He has made the mode of this creation to be our best teacher, by compounding all things in a manner that transcends the course of nature.

Blessed Augustine

Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth shout to you: "God made me!"

St. Maximos the Confessor

Creation is a bible whose letters and syllables are the particular aspects of creatures and whose words are the more universal aspects of creation. Conversely, Scripture is like a cosmos constituted of heaven and earth and things in between.

St. Symeon New Theologian

We see the Creator by analogy. That is, by the greatness and the beauty of His creation.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Everything is a source from which you can distill a higher and more celestial knowledge that is both valid and useful. Yet this understanding will alter from one person to another, depending upon their power of penetration, their attention, and their faith and devotion. Those who relentlessly and enthusiastically pursue these exercises will in time feel enriched by the wealth of knowledge that is yielded.

When we can do so successfully, the world will be like a holy book filled with uncountable and wonderfully different paragraphs; then any object, any event, will refer us to God, so that our thoughts will be directed toward Him. Every activity and movement will be made in His presence. Everything will unveil its divine dimension for us, and this will reinforce the power with which our attention turns towards Him.

This text is fertile beyond anything we can conceive. If everything in daily life can be spiritually reinterpreted, it is because everything is a symbol of the invisible realm, but reflected within time and space....

HB Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch

The mystical way in Orthodoxy requires, as a necessary stage, the contemplation of nature.

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

By contemplating the balance, harmony and beauty of creation, humanity is lifted to a sense of wonder at the supreme perfection of the divine Creator and consequently to love and worship Him. In this way humanity is sanctified and rendered a partaker of divine blessedness for which it was destined.

Young people from roughly the age of twelve or thirteen are quite capable of learning through creation if properly guided. A key to learning about God through nature is to present the challenge as an adventure in discovery. Instead of telling them how to learn, it is far more effective to use a group setting and challenge them to figure out *how* to learn from wild nature. If the program is rightly set up, they are always successful. What do they find? They find that the virtues are the keys to learning because they serve as windows into God's creation. Thus they recover an element of spiritual practice from the desert fathers that has grown dim in modern parish practice.

Whenever an event to learn from nature is planned, there should be a trained facilitator whose role is to present the challenge, to coordinate the activities, and to ask pertinent questions. This facilitator does not teach. Rather the facilitator sets questions before the group and then sends them out into nature to discern answers. The facilitator prays for them while they are out in nature. After an hour or two, they return to the group and share their insights. The facilitator then draws insights out of the group by asking questions about their experiences. In other words, the participants teach, based on their experiences, not the facilitator. This sharing of insights draws the group closer together so that a bond based upon their shared spiritual insights emerges.

This is not for young people only. Adults find endless fascination and spiritual growth from time in wild places – just as did the desert fathers in an earlier era. What is different is that today we do not go to wild places as monks and nuns, but as pilgrims seeking the sacramental and revelatory experiences latent in wild places.

*“In teaching children, lead them along slowly...
Remind them of the goodness of the world.
Before a child can save creation, he or she
must first be taught to love it.”*

If nature is not accessible, another activity that can be valuable for adult groups is to invite a reflection on the implications of extending Orthodox principles into the home and the wider society. This opens a door for examination of what an Orthodox way of life would look like – which cultivates reflection on the culture in which we live.

This examination reveals an issue that is not well explored. As Orthodox in the West, we face an unintentional captivity to the values of the dominant culture. This makes it difficult to appreciate the blessings of the Church because parishioners face a conflict between the values of the Church and the values of secular society. A reflection on how to extend the life of the Church into the world becomes fruitful in revealing the disharmony between these opposing worldviews and in establishing the need to bring the life of the Church into the home. This produces greater stability to the family while

cultivating a more vigorous parish life that is conscious of its responsibility to transform its members while seeking the transfiguration of the larger world.

When adults take time to understand what is involved in this extension, several aspects of parish life come into sharper focus: they identify the principles of the Church, they grasp a larger measure of the implications of their faith to the surrounding local culture, and they see the cross as essential for conveying the energies of Christ into the materialism of the consumer culture.

What is the best method for the parish to teach a responsibility for the health of the world? There is probably no one strategy that fits all situations. Rather, there are many options and opportunities. To select what will work best, attempt to see our present world with the eyes of the future. This means an examination of our present activities and an identification of how our current behavior is shaping the decades and centuries ahead. Once we realize that we are creating the future through our actions in the present, then the parish can design a program to address and change those features of our life that most egregiously are impacting those yet to be born.

What does this involve? The parish creation care ministry has to look at its own local situation and make its own determination. A parish in groundwater depleted Kansas will see different issues than a parish in Pennsylvania where groundwater is tainted by fracking chemicals, or a parish in southern California where a lack of surface water and creeping desertification are serious problems. Once you identify the issues of your parish's location and region, design your approach to address those actions that are most seriously impacting the future health of your area.

For additional activities which apply to most parishes, see the complete list of "Conclusions and Recommendations" made by the Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection during their meeting at The Orthodox Academy of Crete, November 5-11, 1991 (the full statement from that conference can be found in Appendix A at the back of this Handbook).

The following are the main activities which they identified for parishes in their ministry of creation care. (Note that this list was assembled over twenty years ago.)

- ◆ That each Church dedicate the first day of September as the day for special prayers and supplications for all creation — as a day for the protection of all God's creation.
- ◆ That each Church undertake programs of Christian environmental education. This should include all aspects of theological education; the establishment of courses and resources for catechetical schools and the preparation of appropriate materials for use in religious education in secular schools.... In particular it is recommended that September 1st be

seen as an appropriate time for special emphasis in both teaching and preaching, on our need to care for God's creation.

- ◆ That each Church should engage in projects which lead to the enhancement of creation. Each Church is requested to undertake projects and initiatives at the local, diocesan and Church levels. Some examples:
 - Organize recycling programs for paper, glass, metals and compostable organic waste.
 - Conserve energy within parish buildings by using proper insulation and control of lighting.
 - Encourage water conservation... and less use of the car.
 - Consider opportunities for the production and use of alternative energy (solar and wind) as an immediate and practical action.
 - Support the creation and extension of nature reserves.

- ◆ That each parish should examine the use of land, buildings and investments which it controls to ensure that they are used in a way which will not cause environmental damage, but will improve the environment.

- ◆ That each parish should hold gatherings of the members of the Church, covering fields from theology to environmental sciences, in order to aid the Church in practical involvement with environmental and bio-ethical issues.

- ◆ That Churches in a region collaborate on specific environmental issues which transcend individual Church boundaries.

- ◆ That the Orthodox Church encourage and support young people to initiate projects and programs of environmental action, such as work camps related to environmental issues, and educational programs.

It is recommended that September 1st be seen as an appropriate time for special emphasis in both teaching and preaching on our need to care for God's creation.

- Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection
The Orthodox Academy of Crete, November 5-11, 1991

Practical Ecological Responses

Developing a Parish Environmental Ministry

5. Long Term Goals: A Vision for the Future

We call on every conscience to awaken! We call you to a virtual apostolic commission to spread the word about the necessity for a common confrontation of these [ecological] problems.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

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.

- HE Archbishop Demetrios

In the Book of Isaiah, chapter 24, the prophet describes the pain, poverty and pestilence that persists for humanity when the people disobey God. In the next chapter, Isaiah describes the remarkable changes that take place after the people repent and obedience returns to the world. The land that was previously filled with plagues and pain becomes a land of milk and honey and rejoicing.

“...ecological action is modern terminology for obedience to God.”

This story applies to our present society as much as to the world of the past. With this in mind we should understand that ecological action is modern terminology for obedience to God and the ancient commandments applied to our modern world.

The goal of the spiritual life is *theosis* and union with God, but it is also the realization of the promises that Jesus makes to us. Scattered across the Gospels, He says, “My joy I give to you...,” “My peace I give to you...,” and “happy (*makarios*) are you when you do these things” – meaning all of those things that He tells us to do.

These life-enhancing qualities that accompany a life in the Church cannot be bought or sold, because they are only acquired through faithfulness in spiritual striving, participation in the sacramental mysteries, and intentional spiritual striving. This striving must include the way we live our lives and relate to all that is around us.

A life in obedience to Jesus Christ leads to fellowship with one another and eventually to parish as community. Parish as community allows us to support one another in our spiritual striving; it also cultivates ways of living that are benevolent and harmless toward neighbor and creation alike. Through intentional efforts toward community, we nurture the Orthodox *ethos*, the habits, and the patterns of living that shape a more sensitive approach to God's creation. In this way ecology in the Church becomes a means for the restoration of a whole Orthodox way of life. This is necessary because the present coarsening culture is causing society to slide into greater depths of depravity, debauchery and degradation of the environment.

The traditional Orthodox ethos – when applied – defeats these coarsening forces. When a striving for *theosis* is integrated into daily life, beauty and harmony flourish alongside a striving for right livelihood and a respectful relationship to all other life as part of a comprehensive understanding of Christian praxis. Because our actions are extensions of our vision, worship and prayers, we can't have a completely right worship of God without embracing a right relationship to the creation. It is all connected. This is a further reason why Orthodox Christian living should be another way of describing harmony with God's creation.

“Ecology in the Church is a means for the restoration of a whole Orthodox way of life.”

Harmony with creation means obedience to God while embedding our life into the ecosystem of the planet. This is our first goal. If we strive for integrity, we will also strive for the harmlessness which this goal implies. Therefore we seek alternative forms of energy, not the polluting fuels of coal, oil, and gas. In the future private transportation will become more expensive and more difficult. As Orthodox Christians we should wean ourselves from those fossil fuels that harm our neighbors and the life of the planet. We must do everything within our capabilities to adopt clean and green renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power and other emerging energies. Parish families will need to live closer to one another. The long commutes of the past will no longer be so easy after the time of peak oil is passed. Fuel prices will rise; the cost of travel will rise, and long commutes to Church will become harder to sustain.

The parish communities of the future will emphasize locally produced foods. They will live closer to the earth and prioritize clean water and clean food. One legacy after decades of intense pesticide and chemical use is that the earth, air and waters have

become tainted with persistent contaminants. We need to employ systems that will restore cleanliness and maintain healthy environments for children and families. This will not be easy. In our present state of complicity and cooperation with industrialized consumer society, Orthodox parishioners are just as susceptible to environmental pollutants and the ailments which result as other members of society. With intentionality this can change. The evidence is that people who eat low on the food chain, who choose clean foods, and who avoid toxic contaminants, have a lower incidence of cancer and other environmental diseases. As the problems of toxic pollutants intensify, thoughtfulness in dietary choices will become more important.

“Harmony with creation means that we obey God while embedding our life into the ecosystem of the planet.”

In past centuries the local church was the center of the town or village. As much as we can regain that design, we also regain a more fervent parish fellowship and the opportunity to cultivate a genuinely Orthodox way of life. Without an Orthodox way of life, young people will be vulnerable to all manner of decadence and the migration of youth from the Church will continue. To live otherwise is to live a double-minded life that tears especially at young people who quickly discern the inconsistencies in our assumptions and behavior.

Care for Creation in the parish sets us on a path that leads to a series of consequences. It leads first to an engagement with the structural problems in society. Local self-sufficiency will become a greater priority. This will encourage a higher emphasis on the spiritual life and a more intentional striving for *theosis* because we cannot achieve these transitions without a more fervent degree of spiritual formation. At the same time our hierarchs will need to play a larger role in the education of clergy and parishioners alike. Spiritual leadership at the regional level will be important. It will become obvious that a more vigorous spiritual education is important so that from an early age all Orthodox strive for a life in harmony with God and creation. It is pertinent to note that the challenges of a green lifestyle are similar to the challenges of *theosis*. The obstacles are ignorance, forgetfulness and spiritual laziness, the same obstacles that the ascetic Fathers of the *Philokalia* identify as the barriers to transformation. We are building a more comprehensive and integrated Orthodox Christian life in America.

The Scriptures tell us that creation “groans in travail,” awaiting the sons of God (cf. Romans 8:19-21). Dr. Philip Sherrard, translator of the *Philokalia* into English, tells us that our present society is now in the process of what he calls “a second fall.” He sees this because historically Christians had to contend only with sins that arose from “the world, the flesh and the devil.” Now, he says, this is changing. We are encountering a fourth kind of sin – a sin that is embedded in the very structure of society. This might

be called institutional sin, or structural sin. It arises because of the sinful assumptions that are built into the concepts and design of the social fabric. For instance, by driving a vehicle which exhausts harmful vapors and gases, medical studies document that this increases the likelihood of childhood asthma and other respiratory ailments for those who breathe that contaminated air. The person driving is not intentionally harming children, yet this may be a direct consequence, especially in congested urban areas.

The vehicle driver may be unaware of the harm that is being inflicted upon his or her neighbors, but the very act of inflicting harm causes that person to live outside of grace and outside the blessing of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Sherrard asks a series of probing questions regarding our modern world:

Can we be in a state that allows us to assimilate and incarnate God's mercy in our lives while we continue quite consciously and voluntarily to engage in practices that violate His creation and blaspheme against Him? Before we can be in a state of grace, must not our inner being accord with the outer activities in which we engage? Can we be in a state of grace while sitting in an airplane or a car vomiting poison into the air? And by living in today's societies can we avoid engaging in practices equivalent to, in fact far worse than, sitting in an airplane or a car vomiting poison into the air and equally a violation of God's will? Do we not have to do God's will "*on earth as in heaven*" before we can be in a state of grace or actualize the divine image within us? Can we assimilate and incarnate God's mercy while we continue wittingly and willfully to crucify the cosmic Christ, the divine embodied in every God-created form? (Philip Sherrard, "The Desert Fathers and Ourselves," in *Divine Ascent*, Issue One, Great Lent, 1997.)

This is precisely why the Apostle Paul declares that creation is awaiting "the sons of God" to remedy the travails of creation. He says this because it will take spiritual will and resolve to break out of the systems that bind us into destructive ways of living. Ecological action must be married to *theosis* to vitalize our efforts and give strength and impetus to efforts that will renew and restore creation.

"Ecological action must be married to theosis to vitalize our efforts and give impetus to efforts that will renew creation."

The implication is that we must embrace a whole Orthodox way of life if we are to restore integrity and wholeness to creation. Every little action counts, but the task is larger than replacing light bulbs and reducing our use of water in the shower.

Ecology in the Church ushers in a vision of participation with Christ and the Holy Spirit and brings a cosmic dimension to parish activity.

“The insight that the cosmos itself is a vast liturgy is a revelation of the cosmological dimension to the liturgy of the Church.”

Theologian Vincent Rossi reflects on the Early Church and its awareness of the importance of a cosmic dimension to our liturgical worship and our lives:

The fullest example in the Christian tradition of the metaphysical, theological and ethical unity of science, religion, contemplation, and asceticism in a cosmic vision that is unifying, reconciling and ecological is the liturgical cosmology of St. Maximos the Confessor.... Liturgy, in the sense that St. Maximos uses it, is not to be considered in terms of conventional church ceremonies consisting of outwardly figurative words and actions in which one satisfies his religious duties by placing his body in a pew in an ordinary, untransmuted, and unregenerate state of consciousness....

The Byzantine Church of St. Maximos' time recognized liturgy as the *topos*, or place, of the direct link between human knowing and ethical action with the well-being of the cosmos and the metaphysical transparency of things.

The insight that the cosmos itself is a vast liturgy is a revelation of the cosmological dimension to the liturgy of the Church. This *theoria*, itself the fruit of natural contemplation..., leads St. Maximos to interpret the Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Church as sacred cosmology in salvific action.... We can clearly see this conception fully expressed in St. Maximos' commentary on the Divine Liturgy, the *Mystagogia*. His very choice of title is instructive, for a *mystagogy* is an initiation into a mystery.

Vincent Rossi sums up St. Maximos' liturgical description of the cosmos by pointing out that Maximos unites the human image, the image of the cosmos, and the Divine image in and through the sacrifice of the Logos. Because the human image and the cosmic image are reciprocal in the thought of the Byzantine spiritual master, the inner constitution and condition of the human soul, or *microcosmos*, will be seen to have a direct effect on the outer condition of the world and order of the universe, or *macrocosmos*.

He continues:

For St. Maximos, authentic liturgy is sacred cosmology in action. The field of action is the human person as *microcosmos*, united reciprocally to the *macrocosmos*, the universe as a whole. But even the cosmos is not seen as the spiritually empty mechano-organic universe of astrophysicists and evolutionists, but the universe understood liturgically and reciprocally as a Cosmic Man, the *Macroanthropos*, or, equally, as cosmic Church.

The action of liturgy is twofold: First, the reconstitution of ordinary space and time into liturgical space and time, wherein the valences of eternity are manifest, as the Blakean “infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour” intimates. Second, the transfiguration of human nature by uniting mind, heart, will, soul and body into graced wholeness and wellness, which results in a person whose faculties are energized and oriented toward truth, goodness and beauty in self, neighbor and earth. This cannot but result in a person capable of genuinely *feeling* the wrongness of the ongoing despoliation of the environment, which is a desecration of the temple of nature created by God. Enlightened and empowered by liturgy, mankind’s true work in the world, such a person is thus capable of responding with ethical and practical effectiveness toward making the necessary sacrifice that will lead to healing and harmony in person and cosmos.

“For St. Maximos and the early Christian Church, the purpose of liturgy was the transfiguration of the world, not just the moral well-being of believers.”

Liturgy in its authentically Orthodox sense is the transfiguration of nature (not just human nature, but all nature) through the living symbolism of the sacramental act, which unites man and women, this present world and paradise, earth and heaven, the sensible and intelligible dimensions of creation in its totality, and, ultimately, the creation and the Uncreated. In the conception of St. Maximos, which is the view of ancient traditional Christianity, the liturgy is the divinely ordained work of the people in which the essence of religion and science is fully embedded in the cosmos because the cosmos is fully embedded in God. Through liturgy, as cosmology in action, both the universe as

macrocosm and the individual human being as microcosm are transformed, transfigured and deified. This transfiguration and deification is the ultimate destiny of both cosmos and man. Liturgy as sacred cosmology in action is able to accomplish this because the essence of liturgy is communication of and communion with the Archetypal Sacrifice which is the very foundation of the universe.

For St. Maximos and the early Christian Church, the purpose of liturgy was the transfiguration of the world, not just the moral well-being of believers. The heart of liturgy is sacrifice, and the purpose of sacrifice is to make holy. Liturgy was conceived (and is presently so understood in the Orthodox tradition) as the primary work of all people, and the field of this work was not merely the horizon of the individual soul, but the whole world. The Church was embedded in the cosmos and the cosmos in the Church.

The Church's mission is, through the Holy Spirit, who is everywhere present and fills all things, to bring about the reciprocal transfiguration of the cosmos and itself as the New Creation. The responsibility of people on the earth was – and is – to liturgize the world, and by so doing, heal its divisions in an ecology of transfiguring light. (Excerpted with permission from Vincent Rossi, "To Liturgize the World," published by the OFT, Santa Rosa, 2005.)

We have been commissioned by God to renew the earth. What more do we need to begin our parish Ministry of Ecology?

We reiterate through this present message the vigorous concern of the Orthodox Church for the right use of the environment.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
September 26, 1995

If we do not protect the natural environment, then our own survival will become increasingly miserable and problematic.

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
April 5, 1995