

Saint Herman of Alaska Seminary Hosts “Transfiguration of Creation” Conference

Christian Orthodoxy first stepped onto North American soil at Kodiak Island two centuries ago. This very spot hosted the first “Transfiguration of Creation” conference which took place at Saint Herman of Alaska Seminary at the end of May, 2007.

“St. Herman Seminary has placed an emphasis on Orthodoxy and ecological interests for the last five years,” declared seminary dean Father Chad Hatfield as he opened the conference with prayer and comments on the importance of an Orthodox respect for creation.

“The Orthodox Church has always acknowledged responsibility to take good care of God’s good earth,” said Fred Krueger, OFT executive director from Santa Rosa, California. “From a dozen perspectives, we repeatedly discern a duty to transfigure God’s creation.” Jesus Christ demonstrates it; the Scriptures mandate it; and the Fathers teach it. Our patriarchs and hierarchs call for it; the modern context with its rampant pollution necessitates it; and the Orthodox “pro-life principle” implies it. Spiritual striving embraces it; the Orthodox vision of the Holy Spirit “everywhere present” presumes it; and missionary sensitivity cultivates it.



Father Vasily reflects on the meanings of creation along the shoreline of Near Island, Kodiak, Alaska.

Further, young people intuit it; the Divine Liturgy epitomizes it; and salvation requires it (cf. Rev. 11:18).

Anne Glynn Mackoul, a member of the OFT steering committee from Princeton, New Jersey, presented the ecological vision of His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch.

Ms. Glynn Mackoul highlighted His Beatitude’s call for recovery, with a view to the transfiguration of nature, the three traditional forms of asceticism: fasting, vigilance and charity. Each has important ecological relevance. The spirit of fasting which should be diffused throughout the whole of our civilization, declares His Beatitude, “cultivates a change from an exploitive relationship with nature to one modeled on the Eucharist.”

“Furthermore, tradition tells us that fasting is inseparable from mercy and sharing. The Fathers have underlined that physical matter passes continuously from one body to another, and thus the universe is a single interconnected body – that of humanity. That is why, for them, the earth belongs only to God. Humans are only its managers, and the consequences of human activity, in a prolongation of eucharistic sharing and in a spirit of fasting, should be the subject of a beneficent circulation; that is, a just distribution. A cosmology of transfiguration is thus inseparable from a sociology of communion, even though this has to be continuously invented anew in the changing circumstances of history.”

“The function of vigilance resists the idolatries which close our eyes to the truth of things.... Vigilance makes us attentive to the beauty of things

which is certainly precarious, but through which appears the Resurrected One in whom all is alive forever....”

“Charity seeks to transform the cosmic life which flows through us....”



Other conference themes included The Bible as an Ecological Handbook, the moral and ethical implications of climate change, and “nature as our best teacher,” a theme taken from the writing of Saint John Chrysostom.

“The Ecology Retreat was a perfect way to expand a better theological understanding of Orthodoxy and the environment,” declared Fr. Chad after the conference. “But it was also an apologia for the Native Alaskan Orthodox people who are working to be the Orthodox voice in a state where many activists believe that Christianity is anti-environmental.”

Note: If parishes or deaneries wish to host a local “Transfiguration of Creation” workshop, please contact the OFT for further information.

