

## Seminar on Orthodoxy and the Environment

### Monasticism and the Renewal of Creation

Orthodox Spiritual Life and the Environment:  
A two-day dialogue on Orthodoxy and the Environment,  
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Christ is risen!

Welcome to St. Tikhon's monastery. You are always welcome here. This is America's oldest monastery. Many pilgrims come here during the year. This is a good place to make a retreat. to slow down and to find ourselves.

We might look at the ecological problem and the ecological problem, to some extent, represents a loss of our identity... If we would know who we are, we would also know who Christ is.

If we knew who Christ is, then we would be able to treat everybody a little bit better and this would make this a better world.

My topic today is monasticism and the restoration and the renewal of creation. Patriarch Bartholomew understood this relationship very well and he commissioned a service by monk of the Holy Mountain, for Sept 1, a service for the preservation of creation. A service commemorated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Sept.

Interesting to remember that this is a monastic rite...

The monastic rite and the cathedral rite were side by side. After sack of Constantinople in 1204, the cathedral rite lost its preeminence. The monastic rite started to take over. Monastic rite different from cathedral rite.

In the opening of Matins, we read Psalm 103 which points to an amazing reverence and respect for the creation. pointing always to the true purpose of creation, as we all know, which is to serve as an icon for Almighty God. This service is available through Syndesmos. The vespers for the

preservation of creation. They have a three book set.

Quote from the Vespers of Creation

“O Merciful Lord...  
Look with an eye of compassion on the works of Thy hands,  
Take pity on what you have fashioned and give prudence  
Granting to all pardon and divine mercy....

Sounds like a pretty good hymn.

Most of the time when we are acting senselessly, it is because we have forgotten Christ.

Saint Mark the Ascetic tells us that this is due to forgetfulness of God. And then the more we forget ourselves.

The Psalm says be still and know that I am God.

That is very important in the return, a medicine, on how to now act senselessly.  
This is part of hesychasm which is at the very heart of Orthodox spirituality.

We despoil the environment when we forget God. In the process of forgetting, we very much fall into a tendency to sin.

The monks who wrote this are deeply aware of themselves but also everyone and everything in the created order.

Good monastics are not only deeply aware of themselves, but they are aware of everything and everyone in the created order.

God saw it all as Good. The problem in creation is with those who misuse it. The real center lies with humanity....

In the Book of Sirach we hear very clearly that  
“God did not create death.”

The monk or the nun understands that the ecological problem is not really a material problem because at its heart, the ecological problem is a spiritual sickness.

Monastics have always been seen by the Church as the doctors. They are always seen as the doctors of society. These doctors are those who can diagnose and by the mercy and grace of God cure it (the sickness). Monastics together are an example of what our Orthodox life together is meant to be. Rather it is the fullest expression of Orthodox life, the quintessential Orthodox practice. This of course is according to the Lord's own words. If any man wishes to be perfect, let him sell all and come follow me.” That is not a command. If you wish to be perfect, then come do this. It was not a command.

Monastics seek to offer the creation back to the lord, They are deeply aware of the creation.

Monasticism is a search for the pre-fallen state. St. Anthony the Great's biographer related that Saint Anthony had returned to the first order, to the state of the first created man. In essence he was healed from the Fall. He was at deep peace, like many of the other saints, with himself and with the animals. They submitted themselves to him. He healed them and he reconciled ...

Even the material creation became subject to his command. We call these things miracles.

Those who came into contact with him felt as though they were in the presence of God.

The real enemy of creation, as I mentioned before, is sin and death. By making Christ's victory over sin and death their own, the deep ontological fabric of your being has been changed, transfigured,

Able to see the world as a sacrament. Hence They become true and living eucharistic beings. We can all learn to do this in our lives to perhaps a lesser degree. It is a great spiritual exercise to think of all the good things that you have, all of the good people that you know, and learn to thank God for them.

Learn to thank God for all the good things in your life, for how much you have.

This can take perhaps... and it leaves you really feeling pretty good. Instead of what we sometimes do, we complain about what we don't have.

Giving thanks for the world, the monastics Monks, peering through the world, find God deeply in the world. Then we see the mystery of the world, as Saint Paul says in Romans [1:20], then the world becomes like a window, like an icon, enabling us to see the Lord through it.

There is nothing wrong with creation. The problem is with humanity and its behavior. People have forgotten God. Environmental problems are really spiritually problems. Monasticism represents a fullness of Orthodoxy. Misuse of creation is caused by the passions.

One of the three great passions is forgetfulness of God, says St. Mark the Ascetic.

The world becomes like a window. Becomes an open icon enabling us to see the Lord through it.

We need to give thanks for the world. Through the world we see the mystery of God. When we use the world selfishly, it becomes totally opaque. Then it is hard to see God. When we offer it back to God, we remember God, then it becomes a living icon of God.

Of course Adam, after the Fall became the first consumer. We are called to restore the state before the fall by becoming communicants. Of Orthodox spiritual life.

We have to overcome the frenzy of the world and the passions that live within us. We need to take time every single day to just stop. To process our lives. At least nothing for ten minutes every single day. Nothing else. None of the other things that we habitually do. Just sit there.... No movement, no nothing. Just sitting there. I tend to worry sometimes about the end, not only the end of my own life, but the end of others who have passed on before me. My worry is that when it is their time to process all this, that then it is too late. There is no more time to process and it is done. Then they are left with a lot that they didn't get to, they didn't really understand They

didn't have time to process their experiences.

Say the Jesus prayer.

Need to take time for quiet. Do nothing at all. No movement. For recollection. Time to process our lives. There will be too much to process when they are done in this world.

I tend to worry that some people when I think about the end. They do not have time to process their lives. They can pass over without having done this. They didn't understand. Thus they don't understand.

St. Anthony reached the state of dispassion, of passionless. Apathia. Or a good word is passionlessness. A state in which the passions are No longer the master, being dominated by sin and death. This victory over the passions pours out to all creation, Then God's blessings pour out to all creation around us. This renews and transfigures the creation.

It is interesting when we look at the stories of the lives of the great saints...  
A story about the frogs.

A disciple and a monk live out in the woods. Frogs are obnoxious at night. Night after night, these frogs they create quite a symphony, you know. The elder told the disciple to go out and tell the frogs to be quiet. He returns and says he tells the frogs to be quiet. But then he comes back in and he says, "I heard their reply." They say "we are not done with midnight office yet."

This illustrates how we hear these stories from the desert fathers and they seem so strange, and there are some other stories, and it seems almost impossible but I wouldn't be too sure that it is impossible.

Because of what the fall means and what the restoration of creation means.

Monks such as Saint Anthony and others reached they reveal that man in this world .. Are profoundly unnatural. Man was originally created sinless and without death, according to St. Symeon the New Theologian. We all have the potential to become what we were created, which is sinless, holy, dispassionate ...and like the first created man.

Spirit-bearing monks are important because they reveal that the fallen state is profoundly unnatural. They were created passionless. Holy, good and in communion like the first created man.

Even St. Maximos sees the world as the knowledge of the tree of good and evil.

We have to go through the world. It is important to remember that when man fell away from God, then creation followed.

As man is restored by following the new Adam, then creation is restored.

Monastics help us to recognize the difference between what we need and what we want. When going to a store, ask whether you need this or merely want it. This helps us to become more ecologically aware.

Going into any store, I have to ask “Do I need this or do I want this.”?

Monastics through their vows of humility and chastity and obedience rid themselves from the false sources of security.

Making this distinction in our own lives will help us to be more aware of our surroundings and help to use things in ways that are more appropriate.

... one of the biggest idols in the world today is probably the will. Monastics are living oblations, showing us that sacrifice is at the heart of living in the modern world.

Offer ourselves for the sake of others, allowing them to be lifted up or changed in some way because they are not acting in a Christian way.... Oftentimes this takes quite a big heart.

The very center of it is sacrifice, especially with those who are closest to us. We can often take for granted those who are nearest us, like our neighbors. This is very easy to do.

We have forgotten how to sacrifice ourselves. This is not only for the Lord, but for those who are closest to us. Neighbors are those who are close to us. Of course Saint Paul tells us in Romans, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, for this is your reasonable service.”

Holy monks and nuns can show us that we must not escape and reject the world, we must reject the passions that despoil the world. It is not about suppressing our energies, it is about redirecting our energies. It is not about repressing our energies, but redirect them. We redirect them into something that is right.

Food is not bad, but too much is gluttony. Misuse of the energies of the soul,

Monastic life tells us to live simply so that others may simply live.

Begins by a life-giving crucifying of ourselves.

The monastic life is an icon of the Kingdom which is to come, yet is .... life to come. Serve God everywhere and seeking their life fulfillment in and through God. New creation can find peace in god by forsaking his own will.

The monastic shows us the need for fasting if we want ... Internet is so dangerous because everything appears right when you want it.

Man is not dependent only on bread, but on God. Monastics who fast to the greatest degree possible show us that God is the giver of...

This ascetic ethos of the Orthodox Church is precisely what is missing in other forms of Christianity. Which have forgotten that this is the critical key

Everything else might be there, but if you lose the ascetic life, sacrifice on the altar of life. Great lack of this ascetic ethos.

Everything else might be there, the right music, right worship, theology, right buildings, right

people. But if you lose the ascetic life, you lose the foundation. It can't subsist on any other foundation. It is all based on the altar of sacrifice.

The ascetic ethos exhibited par excellence by monastics. Places things in their proper perspective.

If you haven't eaten anything all day and maybe you have to go to the doctor on Holy Friday and somebody gives you an Apple, marvellous the way that it is formed. How it is coated in this beautiful wrapping.

This effort is something we will fight until our very last breath. Don't think that there is any freedom from temptation.

Through this ascetic ethos when we leave this world, our heart's desire will not be on things of this world. Or things that perish. This is one of the biggest problems with addictions, you know, people dying in a state when they are on drugs... When you die, there is no more possibility of serving this terrible material thing, as there will be no more possibilities .... Rather this ascetic ethos leaves us with a desire for goodness, for love and for the Lord and for love and we will most certainly be able to be at rest in the eternal Kingdom.

The monastery cell sanctifies not only the monastics and those who visit, but also the trees and the rocks and the ground. How often we hear the phrase, "this is holy ground." We know that the material world when it comes into contact with the right body, which is the Church, it is illumined with grace, it is transformed. It is said that this sort of contact.

It is said that this sort of sanctification affects the entire universe.  
I know that this is said about the Nativity it is for the entire universe.

We then become a catalyst for the salvation of nations.

This kind of sanctification affects the entire world.

The wrath of creation would be much more severe if it were not for the prayers of the saints.

Monastics understand being in harmony with the world. Acquire salvation and ten thousand around you will be saved....

We need to do what we can do in our own personal world.

God will be put back into the center of things.

Live that life deeply and seek real change.

The wrath of the world would probably be much more fierce if it were not for the prayers of the saints.

Prayers... comes out of our hearts  
The world being transfigured through him... through Christ.

Most monasteries are self-sustaining.... They do understand this idea of being in harmony with the

world.

Transfiguration of the universe has to happen within ourselves first. Then when it happens here, then God is put back into the center of things.

Needs to be restored by the Logos. We need to focus on this inner work so that real changes might be possible.

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