

## Symposium on Orthodoxy and Ecology

Sponsored by  
HE Archbishop Iakovos, HE Metropolitan Philip,  
HE Metropolitan Theodosius, Holy Cross Seminary Alumni Association,  
St. Vladimir's Seminary Alumni Association, The Antiochian Village, and  
The North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology

### For the Transfiguration of Nature

#### A Statement of Orthodox Responsibility for Creation

Ligonier, Pennsylvania  
October 8 - 11, 1989

#### **Preamble**

The Earth is in danger. While a crisis of prodigious portions looms before all creation, our society continues down a path of excessive consumption and despoliation of the land. The effects of this crisis are changing our weather, poisoning our lakes and streams, fouling our air, eroding our soils, and endangering the health of every person on the planet.

At the root of this predicament lies the failure of society to embrace the ecological dimensions of Scripture and the theology of the Church. What is despoiling the earth and increasingly doing violence to people is our sin. It is greed, gluttony, love of luxury, and all of the deadly sins of fallen human nature which underlie this crisis.

To address this crisis, representatives of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America; the Antiochian Archdiocese; and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), together with Saint Vladimir's Seminary and Holy Cross Seminary, and the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology, jointly convened a symposium in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The following statement represents participant consensus on Orthodox responsibility in this serious ecological predicament.

## Christian Responsibility for Creation

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it is God's "*oikonomia*," or Providence, which governs all Creation and defines humanity's role in it. Through God's will, we are born into this earthly habitation ("*oikos*," or home) to work out our salvation, "to dress it and keep it," and to raise it into its full cosmological potential in Christ.

As Jesus Christ came to earth to redeem a fallen humanity, so human responsibility is to redeem creation. To enter into this work of earthly redemption is to enter into the salvific work of Jesus Christ. This implies that Christ's example must inform every facet of Orthodox life and livelihood, and that each Christian is called upon to "save" the earth.

The implication for every Orthodox person and for every parish is that we must identify and apply the earth healing dimensions of our Orthodox faith. The following brief statements identify some of the initial steps toward the Transfiguration of Nature.

### **The Incarnation**

The birth of Christ reflects the love of God for the whole created order, not just humanity. Jesus Christ came to serve and to sacrifice himself in order to raise the whole world. The life of Christ exemplifies the quality of love to which we are called in redeeming creation.

### **Prayer**

The action of Christ provides the power and strength to repent. To paraphrase the Psalmist, "Unless the Lord heal the creation, they labor in vain." We need to pray for ecological change, and that change needs to begin in ourselves.

### **Fasting**

Since our ecological plight derives from sin and a decline from the precepts of our Lord, fasting addresses this as it is purifying as well as conserving of resources. Fasting also looses the bonds of wickedness and brings us into closer relationship to Jesus Christ.

### **Repentance**

As Saint John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord by teaching repentance, so each person needs to repent from earth-desecrating habits. Our salvation is intimately intertwined with saving the earth. Unless we find a radical change of heart, we will not be able to generate the tremendous changes that are necessary.

### **Sacramental Living**

Sacraments raise the fallen world into a spirit-filled relationship with God. The Eucharist is central to the sanctification of Creation as this allows participation in Christ's continuing sacrifice and transformation.

## **Iconography**

A natural catechetical tool for teaching responsibility for the Creation are icons. They provide a visual image which adds depth to instruction and they depict a vision of a perfected humanity bringing healing to the earth and its environs.

## **Dominion**

Submission to Jesus Christ is primary in finding a holy and complete relationship to the creation. Without dominion over fallen human nature and the passions which defile the individual, a blessed and sanctified dominion in nature does not exist.

## **Asceticism**

Overconsumption and greed are destroying the earth. These are overcome through remembering the ascetical teachings of Christ and the Church, and through a deliberate self-denial of personal wants through self-restriction.

## **Resurrection**

Human life is continually renewed through conscious participation in Christ's redemption and resurrection. This provides a door which allows for the recovery of the paradisaical state as well as the transfiguration of nature.

## **The Transfiguration of Nature**

What God gives to humanity is the whole creation. The creation mirrors human relationships with God. As man finds goodness, this is reflection of inner goodness; as he finds destruction and decay, this too is a reflection of his inner condition.

As Christ came to earth to redeem humanity, so each person is to redeem the earth. Through "*theosis*," or the path of deification, creation is raised and transfigured as the individual is raised and transfigured. The Transfiguration of Nature embraces the complete purpose of human life on earth.

The whole life of the Church reflects a concern for the Creation. As practices are adapted that ground theology, the recovery of a whole Christian way of life occurs. To initiate this process and to address the ecological crisis, we, the assembled participants of this "Symposium on Orthodoxy and Ecology," concur on the following considerations to which Christ calls us to action:

## Recommendations

- ◆ A life of heart-felt repentance, a “*metanoia*” that submits itself to Christ and looks to the earth to serve and save.
- ◆ A life of justice that emphasizes a proper use of natural resources and the avoidance of immoral profiteering, waste and exploitation of Creation.
- ◆ A life of sufficiency that is characterized by the limited use of material goods and an ecological asceticism.
- ◆ An awareness of our Christian responsibility to redeem the earth and bring it to its transfigured fulfillment.
- ◆ A realization that our salvation as individuals and as a community is connected to our use or misuse of Creation.
- ◆ A remembrance that the biblical call to prayer, fasting and almsgiving has an ecological dimension which is earth healing.
- ◆ A commitment on the part of pastors and parishioners to embrace the ecological dimensions of the Orthodox theology of Creation, to implement it in every parish and jurisdiction, and to teach it throughout the land.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must love the earth as we love ourselves. Then we can join with Doestoyevskiy’s Fr. Zosima as he exhorts us:

Love all of God’s Creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will soon perceive the divine mystery in things.

We must open our hearts to the plight of all creatures and find therein such a poignant brother love for them all that we are moved to rise up with a prophetic fire to condemn the desecration that is now going on. We have been commissioned by God to “replenish the Earth.” We need no other justification or incentive to begin.

# The Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection

The Orthodox Academy of Crete  
November 5-11, 1991

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Section I

After His All-Holiness Patriarch Dimitrios I called for the first day of the liturgical calendar to be a day of thanksgiving and supplication for creation, His All-Holiness invited the heads of all the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches to meet to discuss the consensus of the entire Orthodox Church regarding problems surrounding the protection of the natural environment. This led to the convocation of the Inter-Orthodox Conference, reported here, and its conclusions.

The Conference was chaired by His Eminence John, Metropolitan of Pergamon. His Beatitude Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, served as Conference President. Hierarchs from the Patriarchates of Moscow, Romania, Greece, Serbia, Finland, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Crete and Czechoslovakia, all participated. Official representatives from the Assyrian Church of the East and the Coptic Orthodox Church also attended.

### Section II

The conference reached the following main conclusions regarding the ecological problem:

- (A) The Orthodox Church shares the sensitivity and the concern of those who are distressed about the increasing burden on the natural environment due to human abuse, which the Church names as sin, and for which the Church calls all human beings to repentance. There is a [secular] tendency to seek a renovation [or revision] of ethics while the Orthodox Church believes the solution is to be found in the liturgical, eucharistic and ascetic *ethos* of the Orthodox tradition.

- (B) The Orthodox Church is not to be identified with any ecological movement, party or organization from the point of view of ideology or philosophy.... The Orthodox Church, being the Church, constitutes a presence and a witness to a new mode of existence following its specific theological outlook of human beings' relationship with God, with one another, and with nature.

### Section III

Once the above principles are borne in mind, the participants of the Inter-Orthodox Conference would like to call respectfully upon their individual Churches to consider the following proposals.

1. That the Church draw attention to the Orthodox eucharistic and ascetic ethos which is a hallmark of the Orthodox Church's relationship with nature. The Churches should offer once more this simple, just, yet fulfilled way of life to its own believers as well as to the wider world. Humanity needs a simpler way of life, a renewed asceticism, for the sake of creation.
2. 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.
3. 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 1<sup>st</sup> be seen as an appropriate time for special emphasis in both teaching and preaching, on our need to care for God's creation.
4. 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:
  - o Organize recycling programs for paper, glass, metals and compostable organic waste.
  - o Conserve energy within Church buildings by using proper insulation and control of lighting.
  - o Encourage water conservation... and less use of the car.

- o Consider opportunities for the production and use of alternative energy (solar, wind and biomass) as an immediate and practical action.
  - o Support the creation and extension of nature reserves.
5. That each Church should examine the use of land, buildings and investments which it controls or influences, to ensure that they are used in a way which will not cause environmental damage, but will improve the environment.
  6. That each Church should hold gatherings of the members of the Church, covering fields from theology to environmental sciences, in order to aid the Church in further practical involvement with environmental and bio-ethical issues.
  7. That Churches in a region collaborate on specific environmental issues which transcend individual Church boundaries.
  8. 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. ...

## Joint Statement of the Orthodox Primates

March 15, 1992  
Constantinople

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

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

BARTHOLOMEW, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, and  
Ecumenical Patriarch  
PARTHENIOS, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa  
IGNATIUS, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East  
DIODOROS, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine  
ALEXIY, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia  
PAUL, Patriarch of Belgrade and All Serbia  
TEOCTIST, Patriarch of Bucharest and All Romania  
MAXIM, Patriarch of Sofia and All Bulgaria  
ELIAS, Archbishop of Metschetis and Tiflis and Catholicos, Patriarch  
of All Georgia  
CHRYSOSTOMOS, Archbishop of Neas Justinianis and All Cyprus  
(represented by the Patriarch of Alexandria)  
SERAPHIM, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece  
WASYLI, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland  
DOROTHEJ, Metropolitan of Prague and All Czechoslovakia  
JOHN, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Amen.

## Joint Message of the Orthodox Primate

The Island of Patmos  
September 26, 1995

*“Blessing and glory and wisdom and  
thanksgiving and honor and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

- Revelation 7:12

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

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

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

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

During this time, we believe it is our obligation to underscore what the revelation in Christ means for the progress of humanity, peace and fellowship of all

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

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

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

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

10. Most especially with regard to the ecological crisis, which for all of us is crucial and threatening, we reiterate through this message the vigorous concern of the Orthodox Church for the right use of the environment. Already during our previous meeting at the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate [1992], we expressed this conviction while recording that, by the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, conferences related to this issue have been organized and September 1st of each year has been designated as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment.

Once more, we affirm that we consider this issue eminently threatening, and we call upon all to be vigilant and to take every necessary avenue in order to save and protect God's creation. The Orthodox Church considers humankind to be a steward and not the owner of material creation. This perception is particularly expressed in the tradition and experience of the ascetic life and worship, and above all in the Eucharist. It is imperative today that we all display love and keep an ascetic attitude toward nature. ...

15. In a world confronted by all kinds of sects and terrifying interpretations of the Book of Revelation, all of us, especially the younger generation, are called to learn and to bear witness ... to the fact that only the love of God, of our fellow human beings,

and of all His creation offers meaning and salvation to our lives, even during the most difficult periods of history. ...

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

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

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

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

- + The Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, also representing the
- + The Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine DIODORUS
- + The Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa PARTHENIOS
- + The Patriarch of Antioch and All the East IGNATIUS,  
(represented by Metropolitan JOHN of Pergamon)
- + The Patriarch of Belgrade and All Serbia PAVLE
- + The Patriarch of Bucharest and All Romania TEOCTIST
- + The Patriarch of Sofia and All Bulgaria MAXIMOS,  
(represented by Metropolitan GELASIOS)
- + The Archbishop of Tiflis and Katholikos, Patriarch of All Georgia ELIAS  
(represented by Bishop ABRAHAM of Nikortzminta)
- + The Archbishop of New Justiniate and All Cyprus CHRYSOSTOMOS
- + The Archbishop of Athens and All Greece SERAPHEIM
- + The Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania ANASTASIOS
- + The Archbishop of Prague and All Czechoslovakia DOROTHEOS
- + The Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland JOHN

## Global Climate Change: A Moral and Spiritual Challenge

The Standing Conference of the Canonical  
Orthodox Bishops in the Americas  
May 23, 2007

To all of the faithful clergy and laity of the Holy Orthodox Church throughout the Americas,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*“For favorable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth,  
and temperate seasons, Let us pray to the Lord.”*

At every Divine Liturgy the Orthodox Church repeats this petition.

And the Book of Prayers (“Euchologion”) contains numerous prayers for gardens, animals, crops, water and weather conditions. In her wisdom, then, the Church has always known that human beings are dependent upon the grace of God through the world around us to nurture and sustain civilized society. Indeed, “God has worked our salvation through the material world” (St. John Damascene, “On the Divine Images,” 1,16). While God is the Source of all that we have, and His presence fills the entire world (see Acts 17.28), we humans share a God-given responsibility to care for His creation and offer it back to Him in thanksgiving for all that we have and are.

*“Thine own of thine own, we offer unto thee, in behalf of all and for all.”*

The action of returning creation back to God in gratitude and praise summarizes the commands that God gave humanity in the first chapters of Genesis. These commandments are intended to guide us into a fullness of the spiritual and material goods that we need. God tells us to “have dominion over the earth” (Genesis 1.28), which means that we are to care for the earth as the Lord would care for it. In the original Hebrew, the word for dominion (*radah*) means to rule in the place of the Lord. In the Greek Septuagint, the word for full dominion (*katakyrieuo*) contains the root word *kyrios*, the same word that we use for Christ as Lord Ruler over all. From this, it follows that our responsibility as human beings is to enter into His will and to rule as the Lord would rule.

God also tells us that we are “*to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden*” (Genesis 2.15, LXX). The literal meaning of this passage is that humans are required to serve the earth as well as to protect it from desecration or exploitation. We are responsible to God for how we use and care for the earth in order that all people may have a sufficiency of all that is needful. It is through our proper use of the material and natural world that God is worshipped:

*“Through heaven and earth and sea, through wood and stone... through all of creation visible and invisible, we offer veneration and honor to the Creator.”*  
(Leontius of Cyprus, Sermon 3, On Icons)

What is further implied in the same commandment is thanksgiving to God for all that we have received through the physical world. Thus, each person has a “priestly” responsibility before God (1 Peter 2.5) to offer back to God that which belongs to Him. All this is implied in the Divine Liturgy, when the presbyter offers back to God what He has placed into human care. Indeed, the commandment “to cultivate and keep” the Garden also implies an expectation that we are to share the things of the world with those who are suffering, with those in need, and to have concern for the good of humanity and the entire creation. Even though our first parents fell away through disobedience, our Lord restored this priestly responsibility to humanity through His life-giving Death and Resurrection.

*“We are all responsible for this situation, and each one of us can do something to address the problem.”*

In our day, however, society has failed to remember these holy mandates about the right conduct of human beings. In our pride, gratitude has often been replaced with greed. As a people, we have forgotten God and foregone our mandated responsibilities. We no longer strive for sufficiency and moderation in all things. Too often, instead of receiving the gifts of God as He would bestow them, we heedlessly take from the earth and needlessly waste its resources, disregarding the impact that our greed exerts upon the life of our neighbors and the life of the world. There is no doubt that the pollution and degradation of the world is directly related to the pollution and the degradation of our hearts. “Look within yourself,” writes St. Nilus of Ancyra, “and there you will see the entire world” (Epistles 2,119).

As Church leaders, our concern is service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose Gospel of love teaches us that our response to the welfare of our neighbor and respect for the creation are expressions of our love for God. This means that we are all personally responsible to identify and adopt appropriate moral and ethical approaches to the changing conditions of the world.

Faithful to the responsibility that we have been given within God's good creation, it is prudent for us to listen to the world's scientific leaders as they describe changes occurring in the world's climate, changes that are already being experienced by many people throughout the world. Global climate change assumes many different shapes and appearances within our own country. In Alaska, for instance, the average temperature has risen by 7°, causing glaciers to retreat and the Arctic Ocean to lose its summer ice. In Florida, Hawaii and the islands of the Caribbean, coral reefs are dying. In ocean waters such as those off the coast of San Francisco, higher temperatures now result in lower concentrations of plankton, reducing a primary food source for fish and bird life, and ultimately, for humans. Across the western states, a modest increase in temperature has contributed to a six-fold increase in forest fires over the past two decades. In many parts of America, previously distant tropical diseases, such as West Nile virus and dengue fever, are appearing as a direct result of rising temperatures.

These are all clear signs of a rapidly changing climate. It cannot be predicted in precise detail how climate change is going to unfold, but the seriousness of this situation is widely accepted. And, while it is true that the world's climate has also undergone changes in past centuries, three crucial considerations make the current changes serious and unprecedented:

- ◆ The rapid extent of temperature increase is historically unparalleled. Past changes in climate occurred over extended periods of time and were considerably less severe.
- ◆ The human role in changing the climate is unique today. In earlier centuries, people did not have the technological capability to make such radical changes to the planet as are now taking place.
- ◆ The impact that climate change will exert upon society is great and diverse, inevitably including conditions which deeply disrupt the lives and livelihoods of people on an unprecedented scale.

Climatologists label these changes as the result of measurable increases of carbon dioxide and other so-called "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere. These gases are produced primarily by the burning or combustion of gasoline, coal and other fossil fuels. Among the many consequences, the atmosphere and the oceans are warming; wind and rainfall patterns are changing; and sea levels are rising. Forces of climate change also increase the acidity of the oceans; they raise the ferocity of storms, especially hurricanes; they cause droughts and heat waves to become more intense; and, in some areas, they disrupt normal agriculture. Furthermore, the changes are not occurring evenly: some parts of the world experience drought and others greater rainfall, even flooding. Importantly, the conditions that we observe now are only the early alterations to our climate. Much larger and far more disruptive changes will result unless we reduce the forces causing climate change.



It should be clear to all of us that immediate measures must be taken to reduce the impact of these changes to the world's climate. If we fail to act now, the changes that are already underway will intensify and create catastrophic conditions. A contributing root cause of these changes to our climate is a lifestyle that contains unintended, but nevertheless destructive side effects. It may be that no person intends to harm the environment, but the excessive use of fossil fuels is degrading and destroying the life of creation. Moreover, the impact of our thoughtless actions is felt disproportionately by the poorest and most vulnerable, those most likely to live in marginal areas. By our lack of awareness, then, we risk incurring the condemnation of those who “grind the face of the poor” (Isaiah 3.15). As Church leaders, it is our responsibility to speak to this condition inasmuch as it represents a grave moral and spiritual problem.

*“Immediate measures must be taken to reduce the impact of these changes to the world's climate. If we fail to act now, the changes that are already underway will intensify and create catastrophic conditions.”*

Therefore, we wish to emphasize the seriousness and the urgency of the situation. To persist in a path of excess and waste, at the expense of our neighbors and beyond the capability of the planet to support the lifestyle directly responsible for these changes, is not only folly; it jeopardizes the survival of God's creation, the planet that we all share. In the end, not only is it sinful; it is no less than suicidal.

But there is hope. Society can alter its behavior and avoid the more serious consequences of climate change. To do this, however, we must work together to reduce the way that we have exploited the earth's resources, especially its fossil fuels. As Americans, we comprise barely 4% of the world's people; yet we consume over 25% of its resources and energy. Justice and charity for our neighbors demand a more frugal, simple way of living in order to conserve the fruits of creation.

In order to make the required changes, we are called to pray first and foremost for a change in our personal attitudes and habits, in spite of any accompanying inconvenience. Such is the depth of *metanoia* or repentance. The issue is not merely our response to climate change, but our failure to obey God. We must live in a manner that is consistent with what we believe and how we pray. Our heart must be “merciful, burning with love for the whole of creation” (Abba Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises*, Homily 48). At minimum, this means caring about the effect of our lives upon our neighbors, respecting the natural environment, and demonstrating a willingness to live within the means of our planet. Such a change will invariably require reduction in our consumption of fossil fuels as well as acceptance of alternative energy sources such as solar or wind

power, and other such methods that minimize our impact upon the world. We can do these things, but it will require intentional effort from each of us.

Nevertheless, we cannot stop there. We must also learn all that we can about the emerging situation of climate change. We must set an example in the way that we choose to live, reaching out and informing others about this threat. We must discuss with fellow parishioners and – since climate change is not only an issue for Orthodox Christians — we must raise the issue before public officials and elected representatives at the city, state and national levels. We are all responsible for this situation, and each one of us can do something to address the problem.

In each generation, God sends some great tests that challenge the life and future of society. One of the tests for our time is whether we will be obedient to the commands that God has given to us by exercising self-restraint in our use of energy, or whether we will ignore those commands and continue to seek the comforts and excesses that over-reliance on fossil fuels involves.

*“We must work together to reduce the way that we have exploited the earth's resources, especially its fossil fuels.”*

At every Divine Liturgy, we pray for seasonable weather. Let us enter into this prayer and amend our lives in whatever ways may be necessary to meet the divine command that we care for the earth as the Lord's. If we can do this, if we can render our lives as a blessing rather than a curse for our neighbors and for the whole creation, then, God willing, we may live and flourish. This is not an optional matter. We will be judged by the choices we make. The Scriptures bluntly tell us that if we destroy the earth, then God will destroy us (see Revelation 11:18).

Let us all recall the commands of God regarding our use of the earth. Let us respond to the divine commandments so that the blessings of God may be abundantly upon us. And let us responsibly discern the right, holy and proper way to live in this time of change and challenge. Then we shall “perceive everything in the light of the Creator God” (St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4, 58).

# The Responsibility of Alaskan Native People to serve as Guardians and Protectors of the Sanctity of the Earth

The Orthodox Diocese of Sitka, Anchorage  
and Alaska (OCA)  
October 21, 2009

Whereas, according to the traditions and teachings of Alaska Native peoples, the Earth and the whole creation have always been perceived and experienced as filled with the sacred presence of Life, and

Whereas, historically Alaska Native peoples have approached all living and life-sustaining elements with reverence and respect, and

Whereas, in the Sacred Scriptures our Orthodox Christian Tradition, the creation of the world began with the Spirit of God moving on the face of the Deep, and

Whereas, God so loved the *kosmos*, meaning the whole creation, that He sent His Son into the world to bless, renew and sanctify it, and

Whereas, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Our Lord Jesus Christ came first to the waters of the Jordan, and

Whereas, at the time of His baptism, the Holy Trinity was revealed as the Voice of the Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit descended upon the waters in the form of a Dove to renew the creation, and

Whereas, in commemoration of the Baptism of Our Lord, each year the Church celebrates the Great Blessing of Water at lakes, streams and on the coasts of the seas and oceans, and

Whereas, in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, the Great Blessing of Waters is a normal and regular feature of every baptism, and

Whereas, the parishes of the Orthodox Diocese, founded at Kodiak in 1794, have been conducting this rite of blessing and sanctification for more than two hundred years in

Alaska, and

Whereas, it is therefore the belief and sacred tradition of Alaskan Orthodox people that the lakes, rivers, streams and ocean are sacred to us, and

Whereas, that which is sacred must be treated with utmost respect, care and reverence and guarded from any danger of defilement, desecration or pollution,

Therefore, Be it resolved that the Orthodox Church in Alaska calls upon all appropriate state and federal agencies to reject any so-called commercial or economic “development” that in any way threatens the viability, purity or sanctity of the natural world, especially the rivers and lakes which we hold sacred by both God’s original blessing and the continued invocation of the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify the rivers and lakes along which our communities have been established for thousands of years, and

Be it further resolved that the Orthodox Church in Alaska welcomes and invokes God’s Blessing upon all those who would bring economic development to our communities, *provided* that they can prove by successful and continuing operation elsewhere on earth, (and not hypothetically or theoretically), that they can conduct such activities without potential or significant harm to the natural environment or polluting the waters which we hold blessed and sacred.

*“That which is sacred must be treated with utmost respect, care and reverence and guarded from any danger of defilement, desecration or pollution...”*