

Book Review

Living In God's Creation

by Elizabeth Theokritoff

Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology

Few realize how ecological the vision of Orthodox Christianity really is. Yet it portrays creation as an epiphany of God, and the human person as a workshop of unity, a connecting link uniting creation and Creator. This lofty ideal is to be achieved at a very practical level: we are to manifest our love for God, for other people, and for the world, through "the right use of material things." To communicate this vision, Elizabeth Theokritoff draws on ancient sources—the Fathers, the liturgy, and saints' lives—on modern commentators, and on practical examples from our lived experience. She presents fresh wisdom and insight into Orthodox tradition in a way that is both accessible and relevant to theologians and non-theologians. The thematic arrangement makes it a convenient resource for teachers. It is compelling reading, and demonstrates that environmental concerns have deep roots in Christian tradition.

Elizabeth Theokritoff was educated at Millfield School and Somerville and Wolfson colleges, Oxford, where she completed her doctorate in liturgical theology under the supervision of Bishop Kallistos (Ware). She is an independent scholar and freelance theological translator from Greek, and has served as a visiting lecturer at the Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. She has had a particular interest in theology of creation since 1988, when she served as visiting Orthodox Tutor at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, for the Graduate School on "Justice, peace and the integrity of creation."

The contents of her book:

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- Preface and Acknowledgments
- Introduction
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Themes in Contemporary Orthodox Theology
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Excerpt from Themes in the Church Fathers:

If we want to explore Christian teaching about the created world, where do we start? There is a bewildering variety of assertions about the Christian attitude to the material creation, both from those claiming to speak for Christianity and from its critics. Nearly everyone will quote Scripture: the Genesis creation stories, the Psalms and prophets with their invocations of the natural world, the “groaning of creation” in the Epistle to the Romans, to name but a few. But as we all know, what really counts is the way such texts have been understood and used. An idea may be found in Scripture, but actually have played little part in shaping the Christian world view.

This is why we begin with the church fathers—the theologians, teachers and saints whose writings encapsulate the Church's interpretation of Scripture and understanding of doctrine — and look to see what picture of Christian cosmology emerges from their writings.

Excerpt from The Saints and Their Environment:

In a world that still awaits full transfiguration, ferocious animals may serve to protect the saint, and his basic needs, from other creatures that are less cooperative. The latter all too often include humans: because animals are “unfallen,” part of the creation “subjected to futility not of its own will” (Rom 8.20) their response to the restored image is more intuitive and immediate than that of creatures endowed with free will. A story concerning Abba Amoun, one of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, illustrates the difference dramatically. He was being plagued by robbers stealing his meager provisions, and finally in exasperation detailed two large snakes to guard the door of his cell. When he next went out, it was to find the would-be burglars paralyzed by terror. He proceeded to contrast their behavior unfavorably with that of the snakes, rebuking them as “more ferocious than the wild beasts” who “thanks to God, obey our wishes.”