

His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON

Primate, The Orthodox Church in America (OCA)



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As the scientific community vocally sounds the alarm on the human impact on worldwide ecology, we are increasingly aware of the climate crisis facing us. We are now coming to fully understand the power humanity has to harm the natural world.

We know from the Scriptures that God has given mankind dominion “over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Now this dominion, misdirected, has been extended so that we also have a measure of control to shape even the climate on God’s earth on which we live. The worldwide consensus grows that mankind has misused its stewardship of the earth and that the consequences of mismanagement are increasingly more serious.

We must take these alarms seriously. The climate crisis is predicted to drastically harm the lives of future generations, especially in the third world, where many regions are expected to become inhospitable, leading to famine. Our Lord tells us that all the Law and the Prophets depend on the two great commandments: the love of God and the love of our neighbor (cf. Matt. 22:38-40). Thus, care for our climate and ecosystem is not merely a material problem, it is also a spiritual problem. It is of critical concern to face this spiritual challenge presented by the climate crisis.

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Likewise, it is spiritually harmful to thoughtlessly consume the natural world around us; it is an abuse of God’s gift. As the Psalmist declares, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 23:1). This world is God’s creation declared to be good (cf. Gen. 1). We are merely stewards, never owners, and we have a responsibility to exercise moderation, to care for the earth, and to do what is in our power to stop its exploitation and destruction.

This means that, even if there were no environmental alarms being sounded, our calling to care for the environment remains. We remember that at the creation of the world, “the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there He put the man ... whom He had formed ... and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it”

(Gen. 2:8, 15). It was in this garden that Adam and Eve, the first human beings, received their vocations as caretakers of paradise.

Thus, care for the natural world, the climate, and ecosystem is for us a quiet echo of the first calling of man given by our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ before we wore “garments of skin” (Gen. 3:21) and the pollution of sin spread. It is a reminder of our pilgrimage towards our true home in the Kingdom of God, the heavenly Eden, where there is “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2).

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I encourage all to take up this ancient vocation and begin by individually finding practical ways to become good stewards of the world in which we find ourselves. Aspire to “live quietly” as the Apostle Paul instructs (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11) and reject the ravenous consumerism which devours our hearts as it devours everything else. Reduce your carbon footprint and avoid waste whenever possible. Plant trees and gardens, to not only help the environment but to remind you that during our time on earth we are “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11) traveling towards paradise and the gardens of the age to come.

I urge our institutions, dioceses, monasteries, and parishes: take the lead in your respective areas, whether organizing large efforts to become more ecologically responsible, reducing carbon footprints, or taking climate concerns into account when planning. From diocesan initiatives to beautifying parish properties and gardens to the prayer of individuals at home, we all have our vocations in caring for the world....

It is my sincere hope that in coming years and decades the Orthodox Church in America will become a leader in North America of good ecological stewardship; and that, for the outside world, we will be held up as examples of responsible, humble living, as befits followers of the gospel.

Let us always give thanks to Him Who “bestowest upon us earthly good things” and... May God bless our efforts as we strive to become ever better stewards of His many gifts.

