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# Green Patriarch, Green Patristics: Reclaiming the Deep Ecology of Christian Tradition

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**Abstract:** In environmental circles, there is an increasing awareness of the Orthodox tradition, largely thanks to the speeches and initiatives of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. Less widely known is the considerable body of other Orthodox writing, which is less concerned with specific ecological problems, but addresses in greater depth the theological themes found in his pronouncements. This paper looks at the continuing development of Orthodox thinking in this area, and the increasing tendency to go deep into the sources of Orthodox tradition—*theological, ascetic, liturgical, and hagiographic*—to address underlying questions of the spiritual significance of the material world and the rôle of man within God’s purposes for it. It takes as examples four themes: the unity of creation and divine presence; cosmic liturgy/eucharist and ‘priest of creation’; ‘ecological sin’; and asceticism. It concludes that the Orthodox tradition goes beyond the dichotomy of man and nature to offer a ‘deeper ecology’ in which the physical interrelations between creatures are set within the divine economy for all creation.

**Keywords:** Orthodox; unity of creation; cosmic liturgy; eucharistic; ecological sin; asceticism; patriarch bartholomew; deep ecology; greening of religion

## 1. Introduction

The past sixty years or so, which have seen the rise of the modern environmental movement, have simultaneously been a time of philosophical and religious soul-searching: what was it about modern Western civilisation that had triggered such environmental destruction here and now? Starting from the 1960s (though with earlier antecedents), some writers began to point the finger at monotheism and in particular Christianity. The time-line of environmental destruction, even apart from other considerations, should have raised serious questions about this diagnosis, and indeed its simplistic historical claims have been widely and repeatedly contested (Heckscher 2013, p. 138; e.g., (Khalil 1978)). Yet, ‘sweeping generalisations based on unexamined assumptions’ (Khalil 1978, p. 195) notwithstanding, the idea of Christianity as anti-ecological has lodged itself in the popular mind and created among environmentalists a widespread ‘group think’ which dismissed the Christian tradition out of hand as a possible source for solutions to the environmental crisis. On the positive side, this critique at least agrees that beliefs make a difference to the way we treat the earth. It has often been pointed out since that correlations between belief and behaviour are not straightforward (e.g., (Taylor et al. 2016; Taylor 2001, p. 279)), yet Christians have been spurred to think seriously about their faith and its implications. What is perhaps surprising is the degree to which environmentally-aware Protestants and Roman Catholics, especially the former, have accepted the negative assessment of Christian tradition, so that the widespread ‘greening’ of denominations and congregations often presents itself as a radical revision of traditional church practice and even doctrine (Heckscher 2013, pp. 147–49).

A striking feature of this whole story is that Orthodox Christianity is edited out of the picture almost completely. Some of the early critics of the historical rôle of Christianity did mention in

passing that environmentally catastrophic practices and technologies failed to develop in the Christian East (see (Khalil 1978, pp. 193–98; Heckscher 2013, pp. 136–37)). But they then hurried on to make their case against ‘Christianity’ as if the Christian East did not exist; and for those who followed in their footsteps, it did not, or at best it disappeared from view after about the fourth century (Heckscher 2013). As Jurreta Heckscher has shown in a brilliant and devastating critique of this ‘failure of environmental history’ (Heckscher 2013), the silence surrounding Orthodox Christianity is vital to the case against ‘Christianity’: not just its historical record, but much more importantly the alleged ‘ecological bankruptcy’ of its tradition. Once Eastern Christianity is taken seriously as a continuing and vital part of the Christian tradition, the case unravels completely.

One consequence of all of this is that the rise of an ecological consciousness among the Orthodox follows a rather different path from that of Western Christianity. Orthodox would typically see the ideological roots of a damaging domination of nature as being both Western and secular, so that in our efforts to correct ecologically harmful attitudes and behaviours—and no Orthodox theologian is denying that as members of modern society, we need to do this—we are not trying to reform or reinterpret the traditional Christian understanding of man’s place in the world, but to reclaim it. As the Oriental Orthodox Metropolitan Paulos mar Gregorios remarked trenchantly almost 40 years ago, the very concept of ‘nature’ as something over against ‘man’ ‘became prominent in the Western tradition only in its post-Renaissance, secularist phase, when the centrality of God began to give place to anthropocentrism’. For the church Fathers, the crucial distinction lies between all that is created and God (Gregorios 1978, pp. 19, 23).

Another consequence of the above narrative is that discovering from the literature the part played by Orthodoxy can resemble the search for sub-atomic particles: the presence of Orthodoxy has to be inferred from its effects. Thus Bron Taylor, purporting to cover a broad sweep of ‘religions’, describes how a prominent American environmentalist repented of his ‘simplistic view’ that Christianity was inherently anti-nature, with no more than a bibliographic reference to the Orthodox environmental symposium that had caused the scales to fall from his eyes (Taylor 2016, p. 277, n. 11). He later discusses Pope Francis’s encyclical ‘*Laudato Si*’ without reference to its prominent acknowledgement of the Pope’s especial debt to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (§7–9), as did much of the media when the encyclical was launched with significant Orthodox participation.

In more cosmopolitan environmental circles, however, there is an increasing awareness of the Orthodox tradition largely because of the speeches and initiatives of Patriarch Bartholomew (Chryssavgis 2016, pp. 175–208), dubbed the ‘Green Patriarch’. Indeed, the many symposia, seminars, and conferences that he has initiated in various parts of the world feature a remarkable roll-call of people of all faiths and none who are deeply committed to practical environmental action, but also often agree with him that the external environmental crisis is rooted in the human heart.

Some commentators would see Bartholomew’s concern with the environment as an engagement with contemporary issues, and ‘part of his agenda to modernise a deeply conservative church that can seem distant and insular, with its focus on long Byzantine rituals and mysticism’ (Simons 2012). But the reality of Orthodox environmental thinking is a much more complex one, in which ‘rituals’ and ‘mysticism’, not to mention Byzantine theological treatises and Saints’ Lives, are vital resources for reclaiming the Christian vision of creation.

It may seem curious that the Patriarch so often begins his addresses by explaining why a spiritual leader should be talking about environmental issues (e.g., (Bartholomew 2015)). His belief that environmental problems have spiritual roots and hence spiritual solutions is shared with a high proportion of grass-roots environmentalists, at least (cf. (Taylor 2001)). But Bartholomew stands out in two ways. Firstly, he is exceptionally effective in bringing that spiritual dimension to high-level secular audiences—political and economic leaders, civic and academic institutions—who are indeed accustomed to talking about the environment in terms of technology, economics, and policies. Secondly, he shows publicly and cogently that ‘spiritual solutions’ do not have to be sought in Eastern religions or neo-paganism, but can be deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. This is where the work of the

many other Orthodox theologians to whom we shall refer below is of importance in filling in the background and showing how the ideas fit together. In the words of environmentalist Bill McKibben's jaunty Foreword to an important recent collection of Orthodox ecological writings (which I will cite repeatedly below), their work shows how the Patriarch's 'forthright activism' is not 'some personal tic' but 'an expression of an underlying spiritual tradition with deep connections to the natural world and remarkable gifts to offer' (Chryssavgis and Foltz 2013, p. xiii). Insofar as the Patriarch is 'out on a limb', in the words of his environmental advisor John Chryssavgis (in (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 20)), the 'limb' is shared by a number of Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, and lay people: pastors, theologians, and practical environmentalists, not to mention hugely influential self-effacing visionaries such as Costa Carras and the late Maria Becket.

It must also be said that there are also plenty of other Orthodox at all levels (especially, it seems, the most official) for whom 'the environment' occupies quite a separate compartment from liturgy or theology. In a 2004 encyclical addressed to his own flock, Patriarch Bartholomew states with evident frustration that Orthodox reveal their greatest vulnerability in putting theory into practice, often finding it easier to blame 'Western' development and technology (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 54). But there is a widespread if usually tacit recognition that even before practising what we preach, we need to preach what we practise: to raise awareness among Orthodox themselves of how their rich tradition of worship and theology, sacramental life and ascetic discipline, and even traditional customs encapsulates an entire view of creation as a whole and its relation to God.

A key advocate of this approach has been Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, who is definitely the most systematic Orthodox thinker in ecological theology; contemporary Orthodox writers owe a considerable debt to him, whether or not they agree with him on all details. Metropolitan John has insisted from the beginning, in language often echoed by the Patriarch, that confronting the ecological problem has to be a matter of ethos rather than moral rules (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1992, p. 28). The choices that people make must be grounded in an attitude to matter as part of our relationship with God, and this attitude is shaped above all in worship. Zizioulas' comments on the actual state of Orthodox worship (primarily addressing his own Greek tradition) are frequently scathing, which helps explain why learning from worship in turn requires a process of educating clergy and theologians.

## 2. Themes and Terms

Since environmental issues first emerged as a challenge to theology, there has been a subtle yet discernible shift in emphasis in the Orthodox response. The themes have changed little since the still-impressive booklet put out by Constantinople in 1990 under Patriarch Demetrios (Ecumenical Patriarchate 1990): the paradigm of the Eucharist and man's priestly role; 'God meets us in the very substance of His creation'; 'creation, ourselves included, is of God'; the whole universe offers worship; the call for repentance and asceticism; and man's responsibility under God to care for creation. Indeed, many enduring themes are already assembled in the writings of Olivier Clément in the 1950s and 1960s (Clément 1958; Clément 1967). But in statements and writings from the 1980s and 1990s, (e.g., (Limouris 1990; Ecumenical Patriarchate 1990; Belopopsky and Oikonomou 1996)) the theological themes may seem in some degree props for a call to environmental action. Since then, there has been an increasing inclination among Orthodox theologians to take a step back and explore these themes in greater theological depth, so that whatever we 'do about' environmental threats flows out of what God has done and is doing in all His creation. One might speak loosely of a growing cosmological emphasis, but it is really not a matter of focussing on the cosmos rather than man. Rather, we are talking about a vision of creation—material created being—as a whole in its relationship to

its Creator: what the late Philip Sherrard called a ‘theanthropocosmic vision’ of the sacredness of ourselves and the world (Sherrard 2013, p. 218).<sup>1</sup>

In the language of environmental philosophy, this could be seen as a progression from a ‘shallow’ to a ‘deep’ ecological approach. This might seem a startling choice of terminology given that writers representing the Deep Ecology movement are ‘typically strongly anti-Christian’ (Taylor 2001, p. 294, n. 45), and promote a rigorous ‘ecological egalitarianism’ (Sessions 1987, p. 112) sharply at odds with the Orthodox understanding of the rôle of the human. Yet if one considers what some call the ‘intuition of deep ecology’ (Devall 2001, pp. 22–24)—the experience of ecological interrelatedness, of human ignorance before the complexity of nature, and an awareness of the *telos* of all beings which is to be respected (Sessions 1987, pp. 108, 112, 115)—this looks remarkably like a secularised version of the vision of all things as the creation of the infinite God before whom we stand in awe. Such a vision is the matrix within which human ‘dominion’ has to be understood: a fact self-evident to pre-modern Christians, but fatefully easy to overlook today. The Anglican theologian Willis Jenkins captures well the similarity, as well as the difference, between ecocentric and theocentric ‘deep ecologies’ when he characterises the theology of Sergei Bulgakov (with a nod to Aldo Leopold) as ‘thinking like a transfigured mountain’ (Jenkins 2008, pp. 207–25).

This is just one of the more unexpected ways in which Orthodox theologians, in their quest to rediscover the fullness of their own tradition, are not working in isolation from Western thought. The theological ‘cosmology’ of the church Fathers is a resource of great importance; but patristic texts often need to be creatively interpreted and indeed re-envisioned, not least because today’s understanding of the physical world and its relationships differs so dramatically from that of the church Fathers. In the process of interpretation, contemporary Orthodox often draw wittingly (and perhaps more often unwittingly) from a wide range of Western philosophical, theological, and literary sources as well as current ecological thought; and the process of fashioning all this into a coherent whole is far from complete.

While some ‘borrowings’ are very felicitous, as we shall see, in seeking to apply the Church’s tradition to new problems Orthodox writers also find themselves adopting expressions that do not serve well to convey Orthodox theology. A prime example would be the use of ‘creation’ as a pious synonym for ‘the environment’: originally intended, no doubt, to underline the relationship between the non-human world and God, this terminology ends up undermining the very basis of unity between man and all other creatures. It is hard to reclaim an integrated vision of creation if the available vocabulary constantly undermines it.

Another example is the continued use of ‘stewardship’ language, alongside statements of why it is unsatisfactory. The term seems to have become conventional shorthand for environmentally responsible behaviour, but it carries considerable theological baggage (see e.g., Jenkins 2008, pp. 77–92, 153–87)) jarringly at odds with the bigger picture of creation and humans’ place in it. The 1990 Constantinople statement (Ecumenical Patriarchate 1990) tries to introduce the very rich scriptural imagery of ‘shepherd’ for man’s relationship to the earth, but unfortunately this failed to catch on. So what does it mean if we are forced to admit, apparently, that our day-to-day interactions with the world are just property management after all? Terminology can involve difficult choices, because ostentatious idiosyncrasies of language are best avoided; but these examples illustrate the work still to be done if we are to express the Orthodox vision in a coherent way.

Another through subtler, linguistic hurdle confronting those writing in English today is the difficulty of conveying the sense of *anthropos*, the human being/race considered as one. Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia emphasises that the ‘corporate character of our humanness’ is today

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<sup>1</sup> Zizioulas has suggested that Orthodox theological writing (in Greek) should replace the term ‘cosmology’ with ‘ktisiology’ (*ktisis* = creation) (Zizioulas 2006, p. 35). This would be rather an unmanageable neologism in English, but he is right about the need for a term that embraces all things including humans, and expresses the ontological dependence of the whole on God.

more important than ever ([Metropolitan Kallistos \(Ware\) of Diokleia 2013](#), p. 100); this is a theme prominent also in Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (e.g., ([Metropolitan John \(Zizioulas\) of Pergamon 1992](#), pp. 22–23)). But the increasing taboo in theological publishing against the term ‘man’ in its generic and comprehensive sense results in subtle shifts in meaning, as authors substitute ‘humans’ in the plural (suggesting an aggregate of individuals), or ‘the human person’, or the more abstract ‘humanity’.

To illustrate some of the resources in the Orthodox tradition and the way they are brought to bear on environmental problems, we will turn now to four themes prominent in Orthodox writers: the unity of all creation, humanity included, and the divine presence within it; the imagery of cosmic liturgy/eucharist and ‘priest of creation’; human responsibility and Bartholomew’s language of ‘ecological sin’, which has attracted considerable attention in recent years; and finally the key rôle of *asceticism* as the practical path to perceiving and treating all creation rightly.

### 3. Unity of Creation and Divine Presence

‘Human beings and the environment compose a seamless garment of existence, a multi-coloured cloth which we believe to be woven in its entirety by God,’ declares Patriarch Bartholomew ([Chryssavgis 2003](#), p. 289); and again, ‘the Lord suffuses all creation with His divine presence in one continuous legato from the substance of atoms to the mind of God’ ([Chryssavgis 2003](#), p. 222). Modern Orthodox thinking on the unity of creation and the relationship of all things to God can be traced back to the quest for ‘pan-unity’ in the ‘sophiological’ thought of nineteenth-century Russian religious philosophy, associated especially with the names of Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) and Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) (see further ([Smith and Theokritoff 2012](#), pp. 11–29)). Their thought can be seen as a reaction against the sort of post-Enlightenment rationalism and dualism that is often now seen as the root of the ecological crisis, and they drew their initial inspiration from Western reactions to those tendencies, adopting ideas such as ‘panentheism’. The figure of ‘Sophia’, the divine wisdom, is invoked to account for the possibility of communion between God and His creation (see ([Papanikolaou 2013a](#))).

It has become fashionable in theological discussions to draw a sharp distinction between this ‘Russian school’, and the ‘neo-patristic school’ in twentieth-century Orthodox theology ([Papanikolaou 2013b](#)), which is represented by Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky. This schematic portrayal can be useful in elucidating the presuppositions of different writers; but it also risks misrepresenting the degree to which Orthodox today, particularly if they are not academically trained theologians, may draw on both ‘sides’ in their understanding of creation (sometimes with unresolved inconsistencies as a result). Certainly, the figure of ‘Sophia’ is viewed with suspicion by most contemporary Orthodox, finding more resonance in non-Orthodox ‘eco-theology’ (e.g., ([Deane-Drummond 2004](#))), although it is less likely now to be dismissed out of hand.<sup>2</sup> But the underlying desire to reclaim a unified vision of creation and affirm God’s presence in the material world has defined the agenda for much modern Orthodox thinking, just as the desire to re-appropriate patristic thought has largely defined the way it is pursued.

We do however find distinct differences, sometimes more in tone than in substance, which correspond to the different theological tendencies. There is the spirit we see in Olivier Clément (who draws quite extensively on the sophiological thinkers, as well as many other sources), Paul Evdokimov, or Philip Sherrard: more affective, ‘mystical’, and sensitive to divine presence in non-human nature. Then there is the more intellectual and philosophical approach, which is more jealous of human privilege and alive to any threat of romanticism or paganism. This is exemplified in Zizioulas and to a great extent Staniloae, and is typical of Greek academic theology and official church pronouncements. But it is noteworthy that many important writers on ecology, such as Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware)

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the discussions in [Chryssavgis \(1999, pp. 139–164\)](#) and [Papanikolaou \(2013a\)](#).

of Diokleia and John Chryssavgis, are impossible to pigeon-hole according to these categories, and Patriarch Bartholomew's work presents a veritable mosaic of the two tendencies.

Returning to the idea of the unity of creation, this understanding is no nineteenth-century invention. It is underlined, as we saw above, by Paulos mar Gregorios, drawing on Gregory of Nyssa (331–395) (Gregorios 1978, pp. 64–66). In a key passage, Gregory of Nyssa emphasises that in comparison with the exalted nature of God, all created things are inferior to the same degree (*Great Catechism* 27). Createdness is thus a bond uniting all things that exist, from molecules to man. Man, a creature who blends spiritual and material, is in a unique position, but by virtue of the unity of creaturehood it is also a *mediating* position: when man receives the divine inbreathing it is *for the sake of the whole creation*, so that nothing in creation should be deprived of a share in communion with God (*Great Catechism* 6).

This brings us to the firm conviction, no less axiomatic, that God is not only absolutely other than creation: He also pervades it. In seeking to explain how this works, the theologian that Orthodox keep coming back to is St Maximus the Confessor. It is encouraging to see that as a result, his importance is increasingly being recognised by Western eco-theologians as well (e.g., (Jenkins 2008; Southgate 2008)).

Central to Maximus' understanding of creation is the concept of the *logoi*: the 'words', rationales or essential principles of everything that exists. The *logos* of a creature expresses the creative will of God, but equally, as Bishop Kallistos Ware sums it up,

the divine presence in that thing, God's intention for it, the inner essence of that thing, which makes it to be distinctly itself and at the same time draws it towards God. By virtue of these indwelling *logoi*, each created thing is not just an object but a personal word addressed to us by our Creator. The divine Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Wisdom and the Providence of God, constitutes at once the source and the end of the particular *logoi* and in this fashion acts as an all-embracing and unifying cosmic presence (Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia 2013, p. 91).

While 'existing in Himself without confusion' (*Ambiguum* 7, PG91: 1077C), the Word of God is yet wholly present in the infinite variety of creatures, and inscribed upon them as if by letters: rather as a work of art embodies the *logos* of the artist, as Patriarch Bartholomew says. This is one of three ways in which the Word of God is 'embodied', the second being in the words of Scripture. So when the Word of God in person enters into his creation by becoming incarnate, he is fulfilling a pattern laid down at the moment of creation. This is why the incarnation can be seen as a 'normative spiritual movement', as John Chryssavgis says (Chryssavgis 1999, p. 54).

The 'inscription' of the Word on all things is also what enables us to 'read' something of the Creator in his creation. This is the prime way in which all things serve to bring humans to God, the purpose being that humans will return the favour. Man was intended to be 'a natural bond' and 'a workshop of unity', bringing into harmony in his own person the divisions within creation, and ultimately uniting all creation with the Uncreated (*Ambiguum* 41, PG 91:1304D-1312B). In order to be this focus of unity, man has to be himself focused on God; when he 'inclined towards his senses from the moment of his creation' (*To Thalassius* 61, PG 90:628A), he became a force for division instead. This failure is redeemed by Christ when he comes in the flesh in order to 'fulfil the great purpose of the God the Father' and recapitulate all things in himself (Eph. 1:10).

Maximus' schema makes it abundantly clear that the human is functionally 'central' to God's purposes for creation, and equally how little this has to do with 'anthropocentrism' as 'a power-term ... imply[ing] that humanity is in the centre *without* God' (Bordeianu 2009, p. 111). As in Gregory of Nyssa, man can play this key role precisely because he shares the nature of all creation; he is *microcosm* and the world is man writ large, so that there is a correlation between their destinies (cf. (Bordeianu 2009)). It is in this spirit that Metropolitan John Zizioulas states unequivocally that 'the fact that man is also an animal is a *sine qua non* for his glorious mission in creation' (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1990). Furthermore, the recognition of *logoi* in all creation illumines how our

particular human form of ‘rationality’ (*logos*), far from separating us from other creatures, connects us in a unique way to the logos-filled totality. To quote Andrew Louth, ‘[b]ecause humans participate in the divine Logos, they are *logikoi* and therefore capable of discerning meaning, that is, logos; they are capable of discerning the *logoi* of creation...’ (Louth 2004, p. 189). This also entails that there is no rivalry between the complexity, wisdom, and depth manifest in the human person, and those same qualities manifest ‘proportionately’, as Maximus would say, in the rest of creation. This license to look seriously at the workings of God in the physical universe is starting to be reflected in Orthodox writing (cf. (Knight 2007, pp. 111–123; Woloschak 2011; Theokritoff 2013)).

Many recent scholars have commented on the ‘strong motivation for an ecological consciousness’ provided by Maximus’ vision of creation (Tollefsen 2008, p. 1), and recognised its enormous importance for those who see environmental problems as rooted in alienation from the world, and are looking for answers often anywhere but in the Christian tradition (cf. (Bordeianu 2009; Louth 2004, p. 195)). Indeed, it is striking how a ‘logos cosmology’ finds echoes in beliefs of indigenous religions that are sometimes seen as ‘greener’ *alternatives* to Christianity. Thus Fr Michael Oleksa described how the nineteenth-century Russian missionaries in Alaska ‘could affirm that the spiritual realities those societies worshipped were indeed *logoi*, related to the divine *Logos*, whose personal existence these societies had simply never imagined’ (Fr Michael Oleksa 1992, p. 61). Patriarch Bartholomew will sometimes talk in the same vein: speaking at his Symposium on the Amazon, he commends the belief of the indigenous people of the Amazon that all life is connected and that every living thing has what might be called its own ‘logos’ (Chryssavgis 2012, pp. 192, 283–84; cf. (Chryssavgis 2003, pp. 130, 243–244)). Both of them acknowledge here a process of learning from others how to re-discover our own tradition: as Oleksa writes, ‘there are some insights which pre-modern societies that have become Orthodox automatically understand better than we do’, in relation to ‘the cosmos as ... God’s icon, God’s self-portrait, God’s revelation to us’ (Fr Michael Oleksa 1983, p. 21).

A ‘logos cosmology’ may offer an answer to what many people are looking for in nature-worship, but it does so without in any way compromising the absolute distinction between Creator and creation. It affirms the *paradoxical* presence of the Word who ‘is not participated in in any way’ (*Ambiguum* 7, PG 91: 1081B). Some writers also invoke the terminology of Gregory Palamas to affirm that ‘the whole God is radically transcendent in His essence, and the whole God is radically immanent in His energies’ (Bishop Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, p. 166). On the other hand, ‘reading’ God in creation, and thus seeing visible things as revelatory and symbolic of the divine, in no way conflicts with valuing them for themselves, since one and the same *logos* makes a thing itself, orientates it towards its Creator, and enables us to perceive Him in it. As Evdokimov says of the scriptural understanding, ‘the more nature is firm, living, and full of sap in its own right, the greater is its symbolic meaning’ (Evdokimov 1965, p. 7).

This vision is also clearly distinct from ‘ecological egalitarianism’ in its insistence that the unity of creation does not negate a special position for man; indeed, the unity of all creation with God requires it. This points to an order that is *hierarchical* in the sense used by Dionysius the Areopagite (who after all coined the term); and Eric Perl has suggested persuasively that this unfashionable concept may actually be the key to understanding the value of all creatures, the continuity between them, and the divine presence in all, without claiming that all are on the same level. In this understanding of the world, it is not that ‘nature is ordered to man and man is ordered to God...’, rather, all things are ordered to God, each in its own proper way’ (Perl 2013, p. 29). This is an important correction, because many Orthodox would indeed subscribe to what Fr John Meyendorff (more than thirty years ago, admittedly) called ‘an anthropocentric cosmology’ and ‘a theocentric anthropology’ (Meyendorff 1983). In an ‘articulated continuum’, by contrast, ‘the higher any being is, the more—not the less! it is in the service of ... all that is below it’. Perl suggests that this might be a ‘metaphysical commentary’ on Mt 20:25–27; a text that the Athonite Archimandrite Vasileios, too, has applied to human lordship of ‘nature’ (Archimandrite Vasileios of Iviron 2013). Perl acknowledges that it is a modern extrapolation

to explore how the Areopagite's hierarchical ontology might apply to non-human material creation, but it is certainly an intriguing one.

What does it mean to live in a world thus defined by connection, among created things, and with God? Relationship is a central theme for Metropolitan John Zizioulas, and he has given more attention in recent years to the idea of relationship between *all* created things, not just humans. Drawing extensively on Maximus, he posits a 'relational ontology' that 'consists in conceiving of all that is said to exist as a constant movement of change and modification that preserves (or rather brings about?) unity and otherness at the same time' (Zizioulas 2010, p. 151). 'If we live in a relational universe', he concludes, 'not as external visitors to it but as parts of it, any individualistic approach to existence is bound to contradict not only the will of God but also the truth of our own being' (156). Although his context here is physics rather than ecology, I think the relevance is obvious. The interdependence of creatures, humans included, charted by ecological science is not only something we have to recognise to avoid disastrous physical consequences: it is something we must embrace and learn from in order to be fully human. What Zizioulas is saying here, I think, is essentially the same as Fr Lev Gillet's exhortation to 'integrate our spiritual lives with the life of the universe' (Gillet 1976, p. 19), but in a different key, and in a way less likely to be dismissed as romantic cosmicism.

#### 4. Cosmic Liturgy: Eucharist and Priesthood

Maximus' thought is valued in modern Orthodox theology not only for its holistic character, but also for its evocation of a 'cosmic liturgy'. This term strikes such a chord with Orthodox writers that it is not infrequently attributed to Maximus himself; but like some other supposedly patristic phrases, it has a more complex history. The phrase was coined by the distinguished Roman Catholic scholar H. U. von Balthasar to describe Maximus' vision both of the Divine Liturgy and of the universe (Von Balthasar 2003), but Michael Donley has pointed out that it carries distinct echoes of the poet Paul Claudel, who was also a significant influence on Clément and on Fr Alexander Schmemmann (Donley 2016, pp. 5–8).

Various strands came together to form the liturgical cosmology which is so important for much Orthodox ecological thinking. One is the ecclesial approach to cosmology, and indeed to life as a whole, which blossomed first in the Russian emigration (but can also be traced back to St Maximus) (e.g., (Lossky 1957, pp. 174–95; Evdokimov 1965)). The entire universe is called to enter into the Church, says Vladimir Lossky; it was created in order to participate in the fullness of divine life (Lossky 1957, pp. 111–13; cf. (Chryssavgis 1999, pp. 16–21)). Another strand is the liturgical renewal that began in the Russian emigration of the twentieth century, in dialogue with the liturgical movement in Roman Catholicism. The renewed liturgical consciousness was given eloquent expression in the work of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, for whom sacraments reveal matter in its true reality, the world is the matter of a cosmic eucharist, and man is first and foremost *homo adorans*, a priestly figure who 'becomes himself' in offering the world back to God in thankfulness, in 'eucharist' (Schmemmann 1973, p. 60). The ecological significance of the liturgical renewal begins with the rediscovery of sacramental life not as 'more or less isolated acts of the Church', but as expressions of 'the world as sacrament', 'holy materialism', and 'some healing of man's estrangement from the good creation' (Schmemmann 1979, p. 221, cf. (Evdokimov 1965)). Not that Schmemmann himself was thinking in terms of ecological implications, but he was trying to counter the 'progressive ... alienation of our culture ... from the Christian experience and "world view" which initially shaped that culture' (Schmemmann 1973, p. 7); an 'alienation' that most Orthodox today would see as a key factor in human abuse of the world. The cosmological—and cosmic—implications of 'a universe created to become eucharist' are explored much more fully by Clément, writing at much the same time (Clément 1958; Clément 1967, p. 253; cf. (Clément 2000)); the reader should not be misled by the anthropological emphasis of his titles. The ecological relevance of such a sacramental vision, and indeed of the Incarnation in which sacraments are grounded, does come across a few years later when Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (1971) takes up themes from Schmemmann and liturgical texts, including the rite perhaps most obviously emblematic

of cosmic sanctification—the Great Blessing of Waters, performed in celebration of the baptism of Christ at which ‘the nature of water is sanctified’. The fact that this rite is traditionally performed out-of-doors makes clearer the connection between sacrament and matter as a whole. The Blessing of Waters is not confined to the feast day, and indeed is often celebrated as part of ecological events, such as Patriarch Bartholomew’s ship-board environmental symposia.

Orthodox writers have developed the liturgical approach to creation in two rather different ways. One focuses more on the Eucharist, the *offering of thanks*, as the paradigm for human action and attitudes, and, increasingly in recent years, on the idea of man as ‘priest of creation’. The other explores the idea of praise and worship as the characteristic activity of all things, which is actually the most ancient strand in the ‘liturgical’ understanding of creation. Underlying these different developments we may discern different understandings of the communion between creation and God, and the degree to which it is necessarily channelled through the human being (cf. (Papanikolaou 2013a)).

The image of eucharistic offering: ‘[o]ffering Thee Thine own of Thine own, in all things and for all things we praise Thee, we bless Thee...’, is ubiquitous in Orthodox writings on creation. ‘Human beings are eucharistic animals, capable of gratitude and endowed with the power to bless God for the gift of creation’, as Patriarch Bartholomew says (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 125). This is the essence of the ‘eucharistic ethos’ in using the world, which Bartholomew and others so often call for. The language of creation as a gift to man, worked out in some detail by Fr Dumitru Staniloae (e.g., (Staniloae 2000, pp. 21–63)) and taken up by Patriarch Bartholomew, must always be heard in the context of the *eucharistic gifts*; it never means that the world is simply handed over to humans! Everything remains ‘God’s own’; it is ‘given’ in order that we have something to give back, in order that all our use of creation should be a way of relating to a Giver. And by the same token, since it is a gift to all, the world is ‘a sacrament of communion with God and neighbour’ (Patriarch Bartholomew, in Chryssavgis 2003, p. 315).

In this connection, the language of man as ‘priest’ has been used for many years; initially, alongside that of ‘king’ (the primary image), prophet, mediator, and other images (e.g., (Archimandrite Kallistos Ware 1971; Lossky 1957, p. 111)). But it is a step further to couple the idea of priest/offerer with Maximus’ language of the human as *bond* or *link*, to produce the image of man as ‘priest of creation’. Like ‘cosmic liturgy’, this terminology is often attributed to the church Fathers (and increasingly, glibly cited as the traditional Orthodox view); its origins are obscure, but it probably owes more to Claudel and other modern thinkers than to any patristic writing.

It is John Zizioulas, once again, who has set out systematically the case for the language of ‘priest of creation’: for seeing man as a creature who, as an integral part of creation, takes creation into his hands and refers it to God, through which action creation is brought into communion with God. He argues that ‘priest’ should be at the very least complementary to the managerial image of ‘steward’: it is preferable both because it relates man to nature not by what he *does* but by what he *is*, and because it leaves room for creativity and development (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 2013; cf. (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1996; Gregorios 1978, pp. 84–85)). There might seem to be a tension between these two justifications, and it is not obvious that ‘priesthood’ is the most appropriate image for the latter (see further (Theokritoff 2005)). But even if we take the metaphor on its own terms, it could be argued that Zizioulas, let alone other writers who use ‘priest of creation’ language much less reflectively, does not properly take account of the fact that a priest celebrates only as the representative of a congregation.

This brings us to the idea that we live in a worshipping cosmos. The modern interest in the human activity of worship brings us back to the vision of early liturgical texts (prominently including, of course, the Psalms), according to which human worship takes its place within the worship offered by all things in heaven and earth (cf. (Clément 1967, p. 290; Clément 1993, p. 193; Patriarch Bartholomew, in Chryssavgis 2012, p. 129)). Among the texts in current use, the prayers for the Great Blessing of Waters are often quoted: ‘[t]he sun sings Your praises; the moon glorifies You; the stars supplicate before You; the light obeys You; the deeps are afraid at Your presence, the fountains are Your servants.’ It has

long been recognised that such texts emphasise the cosmic dimension of worship and the sacramental quality of the world, or at the very least the potential for the material world to be ‘rendered articulate in praise of God’ (Bishop Kallistos Ware, p. 54); here many writers like to quote the words of Leontius of Cyprus, saying that ‘creation does not venerate the Maker directly and by itself, but it is through me that the heavens declare the glory of God...’.<sup>3</sup> But there is some interest now in rejecting a purely anthropocentric interpretation of texts describing cosmic worship, and exploring what it means to take them more at face value (Theokritoff 2013). This includes exploring liturgical texts, some less well known, that describe the response of all created things to the incarnation of their Creator (Gschwandtner 2013; Theokritoff 2001).

Far more significant than academic studies, however, is the testimony of contemporary monasticism. The monastic tradition provides a spectacular exception to the rule-of-thumb articulated above, namely that the Greek tradition shows less ‘cosmic’ sensibility. When St Nectarios of Aegina (1846–1920), for instance, enables his nuns to hear the grasses praising the Lord (Clément 1967, p. 261), or the highly-respected contemporary Elder Porphyrios describes the nightingale singing in praise of God (Porphyrios 2005, p. 32), they are heirs to an extremely ancient tradition of the direct experience of that cosmic worship which human worship both emulates and affirms. In more recent centuries, this experience is often associated with the Jesus Prayer, as in the nineteenth-century Russian classic *The Way of a Pilgrim* (cited for instance in Archimandrite Bishop Kallistos Ware, p. 15). If we think of the praise from all creatures as yet another aspect of the *logos* or ‘word’ of each creature—‘ontological praise’ as Clément calls it (Clément 1967, p. 261)—then it makes perfect sense that invoking the Name of the incarnate Word of God should allow us to tune in to it. A remarkable contemporary instance is the life-changing experience of Elder Aemilianos of Simonopetra, one of the pioneers of the twentieth-century Athonite revival, and a major international influence on Orthodox spiritual life today: his night-time vision in which the stars unite themselves with the earth and everything is praying the Jesus Prayer, which leads into the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. One of his monks comments on the ‘deeply ecclesial character’ of this experience: the worship of all creation is ‘a kind of matins service, in which creation literally responds to the call of the Psalmist’ in the Lauds psalms (Fr Maximos [Constas] 2007, pp. 24–5). This has profoundly influenced the way the Elder has organised his monasteries, with daily celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, and a strong sense of the entire life of the community as a liturgy in which the whole environment joins (Aemilianos 1996).

This profound sense of all creation as *participants*, as the ‘congregation’ of a cosmic liturgy, is, I would suggest, the context in which the language of human ‘priesthood’ could be most usefully be applied. Unfortunately, however, the two approaches more often come across as *alternatives*. An exception is provided by another Athonite, Hieromonk Gregorios, who begins an essay on ‘[t]he cosmos as a realm of liturgy’ (Gregorios 2006) with the declaration that ‘[m]an is the priest of God’s world. When man offers the eucharistic sacrifice, the entire creation stands at his side and joins him in glorifying the Creator’. Even here, one of the recurrent difficulties with ‘priest of creation’ language (e.g., (Bauckham 2002)) comes up: why should man need to ‘transform creation in such a way that it too sings a hymn of praise’, given that it ‘utters a trinitarian hymn to the Creator simply by existing’? But it later becomes apparent that Hieromonk Grgeorios is talking about the same trajectory as Elder Aemilianos: the cosmos inspires man to join it in offering praise, and man takes it forward with him so that both ‘become eucharist’, and thereby ‘attain their appointed goal and prepare for the ultimate End’.

This eschatological framework should make it clear that the crucial rôle of man in taking all creation to its appointed end need not diminish the praise offered by all creatures, either before or since man’s appearance on earth. A more cogent reservation about ‘priest of creation’ language concerns the idea that man has to turn the world into something of his own in order to perform his eucharistic or

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<sup>3</sup> Fifth Homily of Christian Apologetic against the Jews, and on the Icons, PG 93: 1604B.

‘priestly’ task of offering it up to God. This was emphasised in a different era by Dumitru Staniloae, for whom the world as gift *and task* is a central theme; and it is strongly emphasised today by Zizioulas, who in his argument for speaking of man as ‘priest of creation’ talks about a development of nature not to satisfy human needs, but *for [nature’s] own sake, in order to fulfil its own being* (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 2013, p. 170). This emphasis is one of the features that disturbs critics of ‘priest of creation’ language, some Orthodox among them (e.g., (Gschwandtner 2015; Theokritoff 2016)). It is of course perfectly true, as we are so often reminded, that the eucharistic elements are the fruits of the earth *shaped by man*. But they are ‘shaped’ and brought in by the congregation, not the priest. This just highlights the difference between saying that our attitude to the world should be eucharistic, even ‘priestly’, and elevating priesthood-as-creativity so that it is identified with man’s function as the link between creation and God. There is an unresolved question of what it implies to take the Eucharist as our paradigm. Does it mean that everything must be transformed and ‘humanised’ (Staniloae 1969) before it can be offered to God? Or does it mean something that is, I would argue, more realistic and helpful: that our creative impulse, being integral to *our* nature, is not essentially in tension with the integrity of ‘nature’ as a whole? In practical terms, it can at least be agreed that our ‘shaping’ must be such that we can offer the human ‘product’ back to God, acknowledging it as totally His own gift. The icon, in which humans shape the matter of this world into a literal image of Christ, is the most compelling illustration of this (cf. (Aidan Hart [Monk Aidan] 1998)). But culture and daily living can equally transform matter ‘into an instrument of communion with man and with God’ (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1992, p. 27), as Clément (Clément 2000) and Zizioulas both affirm. This is surely central to the environmental ethos arising out of Orthodoxy: we are not faced with the grim choice that nature will be ‘either virgin or violated’; there are cultural monuments that testify to ‘a mastery [that] does not obliterate, but releases prayer from things’ (Clément 2000, pp. 120, 35).

## 5. Human Responsibility and ‘Ecological Sin’

What has been said so far makes it clear that Orthodox have no compunction about affirming the importance of the human being for all creation; and that this must be sharply distinguished from an idea that *only* humans count, which Zizioulas and others describe as *anthropomonism*. Rather, it has to do with the connectedness and reciprocity built into the structure of creation.

In the big picture, ‘nature needs man’ for its eternal survival no less than ‘man needs nature’ for his physical survival (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1997a). In explaining why, Metropolitan John Zizioulas starts from St Athanasius’ account of why creation requires salvation: mortality, flux, and decay are *natural* to the created order precisely because it is created out of nothing. There should be no reason to see in this any contempt for the material world: it is a purely realistic description of the state in which all material creatures find themselves, humans no less than others. But it does mean that creation has to *transcend itself* in order to survive. And this movement, Zizioulas continues, is possible only through man, the animal in the divine image, who as *person* can realise his true self only by going beyond himself. The human is created to relate to God and to refer back to God everything he touches (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1990).

But what happens if man fails to relate to God? The key position of man means that he also has a destructive potential exceeding the nightmares of the most misanthropic deep ecologist. Typically in Orthodox thinking, contemporary anthropogenic environmental destruction simply re-runs an ancient story: disorder, conflict, and suffering in creation have their root in human apostasy from a proper relationship to God. ‘Sin has cosmic consequences ... I myself ceaselessly perpetuate the transgression of Adam and destroy the harmony of creation, by abandoning the Creator ... and in return nature turns itself against me’ (Fr Makarios 1992, p. 43).

As Schmemmann already reminds us, the Fall story is all about how humans use the world: whether that use is within or outside a relationship with its Creator. Adam ‘chose not to be a priest but to approach the world as consumer’ (Schmemmann 1976, p. 96). Orthodox are generally happy using the traditional language of Genesis, whether or not they believe in a historical Fall which objectively

changed the conditions of life for all earth's creatures. Others may find this unhelpful, especially as there is rarely any attempt to explore how such language may be interpreted in a world where mortality and predation evidently antedate *Homo sapiens* by millions of years. Not that such attempts are wholly absent (see e.g., (Knight 2007, pp. 86–91; Theokritoff 2009, pp. 79–88; Yannaras 2012)); and we may also note that in adopting the language of St Athanasius, Zizioulas gives us a scheme in which the Fall is a failure to transcend an *existing* state of mortality. It would be a grave mistake to see the Orthodox view as wedded to a literal interpretation of Genesis. The core intuition here is that even the condition of 'nature' is in a sense anomalous, or at least does not represent God's ultimate intention for it; and that humans hold the key to its transformation, not by their skills and technologies but through setting right their relationship with God. This would seem to be supported by the many well-attested stories of holy people, some of them our contemporaries, whose relationships with animals and their natural surroundings image in some degree a paradisaic state (see e.g., (Stefanatos 1992; Ioannikios 1997; Sheehan 2013)).

The same connections underlie the services for 1 September commissioned by the former Patriarch Demetrios when he established this first day of the church year as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment. The Old Testament readings in the original text of the service (Belopopsky and Oikonomou 1996, Appendix) clearly link environmental calamity with human unfaithfulness to God: '[i]f you will not listen to Me... your land will be desert and your farms will be desert...' (Lev 26: 14, 33). But when, in his annual encyclical for this day, Bartholomew calls us to 'repent for our actions against God's gift to us' (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 46), this seems to be going a step further: the devastation of the land is not the *consequence* of sin but its *content*.

The Patriarch received considerable publicity (Chryssavgis 2016, pp. 176–178) by declaring in Santa Barbara in 1997 that 'committing a crime against the natural world is a sin' and enumerating examples such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 221). 'Sin against nature' is avowedly a new concept, and it is not apparent that it has been fully thought through. Some of the attempts to define what it consists in, apart from wanton damage to another creature, seem on close inspection to be either circular or less than coherent. Thus it is not obvious what it means to apply the language of 'sin' to *outcomes* such as climate change, especially when they result from the *aggregate* of actions that are often individually blameless, or the least of evils, or even intended to avoid some other form of environmental damage (e.g., 'clean diesel' cars). Granted, Bartholomew does refer to *voluntary and involuntary* sins in this context (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 221). And it is both spiritually and practically important to recognise that we are implicated willy-nilly in systems and chains of events that damage the environment; we cannot pride ourselves on our green virtues and look for someone else to demonise. But it is equally important to recognise that the causes of environmental destruction are far more complex than 'corrupt, egoistic, insatiable, irresponsible, and deeply sinful conduct' stretching the earth's resources to breaking point (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 335), plus acts of deliberate disrespect to nature, all of which the Patriarch rightly decries.

This does not mean that theology has nothing useful to say about the practical causes of environmental damage. Rather, the fateful environmental consequences of even our 'best' desires and decisions can be connected with the limitations—the mortality—of the world, which Orthodox theology connects with its 'fallen' state. Helpful here is the very nuanced doctrine worked out by the Greek theologian Panayiotis Nellas based on Gregory of Nyssa, according to which all aspects of human physical and social life—marriage, work, science, politics, art etc.—are aspects of the 'garments of skin' which become man's 'second nature' after the Fall. These things are blessings that, used rightly and with restraint, enable us to regain our 'original' (intended) state; but if we 'make them autonomous' and place all our hope in them, those hopes will be dashed (Nellas 1987, pp. 46, 61, 95–96).

There is a risk that the language of 'environmental sin' wins approval from secular environmentalists for the wrong reason: because of an idea that the Church's job is to lay down moral rules (see for example the praise for the Patriarch's 'new environmental dogma' (*sic*) (Tal 2006, p. 203), with the implicit threat that they will be divinely policed. This feeds the sort of guilt-driven

environmentalism that is increasingly seen as counter-productive and, more to the point, sets up a false opposition between ‘human sinfulness’ and ‘human dignity’ (cf. (Prins 2010, p. 5)).

But none of this is what Zizioulas or Bartholomew want to convey. There are two core points, which are not at all new in Orthodox theology. One is that the world serves humans as a means of their relationship with God. Inasmuch as the exploitation or destruction of nature is a refusal of this relationship (e.g., (Chryssavgis 2003, pp. 148–49)), that is by definition sin. Zizioulas actually says that ‘any harm inflicted upon nature would render it incapable of performing its function as a vehicle of communion between us and with God’ (Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon 1997b); cf. Patriarch Bartholomew, in (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 221)), which may be clarified when he goes on to say that harming nature prevents *us* fulfilling *our* relational nature. The other core point is quite simply the compassion for all creatures that flows from love of God and neighbour: Orthodox repeatedly invoke Isaac the Syrian’s image of the ‘merciful heart’, which grieves over the slightest harm done to any creature (cf. Patriarch Bartholomew, in (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 230)). Traditionally, this would not have been seen as a moral imperative (cf. (Sophrony 1999, pp. 94–96)). Talking about ‘sin’ in this context is a paedagogical tool, educating the conscience by establishing as normative something that saints down the ages have discovered through a holy life: that what we self-centredly call ‘our environment’ is also our ‘silent neighbour’ (Patriarch Bartholomew, in (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 234)).

## 6. Asceticism

*Asceticism* is the third leg of the ethos that Patriarch Bartholomew so often calls for. As with the *eucharistic* and *liturgical* ethos of thankfulness and sharing, this approach takes an attitude to material things already deeply enshrined in the Christian spiritual tradition and connects it with the demands of the present environmental crisis. The ascetic way has been refined in the monastic tradition into a highly sophisticated science of the soul, and is most tangibly experienced by Christians ‘in the world’ in the form of fasting discipline. According to the Church’s fasting rules, Orthodox abstain from meat and animal products for about half the year. Eating, that most basic interaction with the world, ceases to be a matter of individual fancy and becomes a communal event.

It was recognised some years ago that there is a remarkable coincidence between the ascetic practices of fasting and self-restraint in the use of material things, and the way of living habitually advocated by ecologists (Gschwandtner 2010): ‘[a]sceticism offers practical examples of conservation. By reducing our consumption—what in Orthodox theology we call *enkrateia* or self-control—we seek to ensure that resources are left to others in the world ... [a]sceticism provides an example whereby we may live simply’ (Patriarch Bartholomew, in (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 219)). Asceticism teaches us to ‘walk lightly on the earth’ and distinguish wants from needs, providing an antidote to a ‘consumerist’ approach to the world (e.g., (Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia 1996)). The direct practical effects of an ascetic ‘life-style’ are often emphasised; thus clergy have been known to parry questions about the environmental impact of human population by pointing out that fasting rules preclude conjugal relations on fast days.

It is important to be clear, however, that such practical bonuses resulting simply from the application of a set of rules are *not* the point of ascetic discipline. Asceticism is a process of purification; but paradoxically, as Andrew Louth points out, ‘[t]he personal life of struggle against temptation and growing in virtue is not simply a personal matter ... ; it is a matter of cosmic significance, for such ascetic struggle restores the human capacity of being priest of nature, interpreter of the cosmos’ (Louth 2004, p. 190). We began this article with the *logoi* of all things wherein all creation, including human affairs and relationships, coheres and *makes sense*. Now we come to the practical side of this doctrine: until we purify ourselves from *passions*, our disordered appetites and desires, we are not actually able to apprehend these *logoi*. ‘We tend not to see God’s meaning in the world and all its parts, rather we tend to see the world in relation to ourselves and read into it *our* meaning. As a result the world becomes an arena for human conflict...’ (Louth 1996, p. 37). This is what lies behind Bartholomew’s words (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 214) that ‘to fast is to love, to see more clearly, to restore

the primal vision of creation, the original beauty of the world...'. The 'wondering and respectful distance' between us and the world, as Clément calls it (Clément 1993, p. 141), opens up to us another, very profound sense in which we receive all creation as a 'gift': it is the means whereby God speaks to us and educates us (Patriarch Bartholomew, in Chryssavgis 2012, pp. 128–42).

I believe that the 'ascetic ethos' is of enormous practical importance for dealing with the environmental crisis, but not for the more obvious, superficial reasons. First, it casts in quite a different light the 'sacrifices' that are inevitably demanded of the better-off especially in order to address large-scale environmental problems. It is not merely that a simpler life is more fulfilling, as many environmentalists have already remarked; the demands of our times cease to be an imposition and become a path of spiritual growth. The crisis itself affords us an opportunity to change the mentality that helped to cause it. Hence the Patriarch's emphasis on what he calls the 'missing dimension' of sacrifice, which he characterises as 'primarily a spiritual issue and less an economic one' (Chryssavgis 2003, pp. 304–8). The ascetic tradition turns on its head the identification of 'freedom' with 'consumer choice', which is often a barrier to environmental measures: as Metropolitan Kallistos says of fasting, 'Lent is a time when we learn to be free' and 'the process presupposes obedience, discipline and self denial' (Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia 1996, p. 66).

The second reason why asceticism is so significant has to do with the paradox of the world. John Chryssavgis points out that the Christian vision of creation consists of three fundamental intuitions: the world is created *good*; the world is *evil*, fallen; and the world is *redeemed*. He points out that 'when one of these is either isolated or violated, the result is an unbalanced and destructive vision of the world' (Chryssavgis 1999, p. 38). The physicist and theologian Christopher Knight observes that 'on the one hand, by its stress on the effects of the Fall, the Eastern Christian tradition has tended in many respects to be more pessimistic about the empirical world than has the Western tradition. Paradoxically, however, it has in other respects been more optimistic' (Knight 2007, p. 80). The important environmental consequence of this 'pessimism' is that we are more likely to accept the limitations of the world and make fewer demands on it. This is an important antidote to the 'emphasis on human progress and achievement, together with the optimistic development of civilisation', which, as John Chryssavgis writes, will otherwise 'lead us to the post-Christian determinism that has influenced much of Western technology and culture during the last centuries' (Chryssavgis 1999, p. 41). Yet the pessimism is often overlooked because the Fall is treated quite matter-of-factly, as we saw with Nellas' 'garments of skin': it is *in the world of the Fall* that we are given the conditions that allow us to survive and attain our original goal in Christ (Nellas 1987, p. 61). And the key to using the 'fallen' world to positive effect is that characteristic ascetic virtue of *moderation* (Nellas 1987, p. 100). The paradox of creation finds its practical counterpart in the paradox of asceticism. Our fallen, dysfunctional relationship with the material world, beginning with our own bodies, has to be rejected before a proper relationship can be restored (cf. (Fr Makarios 1992)): we have to 'kill the flesh to acquire a body', in the oft-quoted words of Fr Sergei Bulgakov (cf. (Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh 1987, p. 45)). The affirmations of harmony, order, and cosmic celebration in the natural world are not a willfully blinkered or scientifically naïve gloss on the fallen world accessible to our senses: they are statements—for most of us, taken on trust—of the world as perceived by purified senses, as received back after ascetic renunciation: the world perceived according to its *logoi*. It seems that Orthodox theologians do not always do a good job of conveying the balance between the three aspects of creation, however, since the lack of zeal among Orthodox for transforming the world by human efforts is sometimes taken to have quite the opposite meaning, and associated rather with the sunny optimism of 'creation spirituality' (e.g., (Southgate 2008, p. 112–13)).

Without denying that 'spiritualising' tendencies have sometimes found their way into the Christian ascetic tradition, Orthodox theologians have contributed significantly to an understanding of the essentially positive character of Christian asceticism: Florensky was already extolling it as being 'in love with creation' (Florensky 1997, p. 212), recalling his spiritual father whose loving care extended to uprooted weeds and broken branches (Florensky 1987, p. 71). The greatest witness to this re-discovery

of the beauty of creation lies in the stories of the ascetics themselves, from the earliest anchorites of the Egyptian desert up to a present-day figure such as Amphilochios of Patmos (1889–1970), who talked of an additional commandment to ‘love the trees’ and was largely responsible for the dramatic re-forestation of the island (Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia 2013, pp. 86–87), or the renowned Athonite Elder Paisios who could see a blade of grass as an icon, full of the energies of God. John Chryssavgis has written eloquently about the Desert Fathers who attained ‘equilibrium with the whole of (their) environment’ (Chryssavgis 1999, p. 95). His studies present these severe ascetics in their harsh landscape in an unexpected light: as witnesses to the sacredness of creation, characterised by a love for the land, a harmonious relationship of mutual care with the animals and even the elements, and joy, humility, and veneration of the neighbour. (Chryssavgis 1993; Chryssavgis 1999, pp. 90–118). And it is hardly a coincidence that in the Orthodox Church, monasteries have been at the forefront of implementing organic farming and conservation measures, seeing this as the most natural contemporary manifestation of the traditional relationship between monastics and their environment.

It could be objected that it is unrealistic as a ‘programme’ to declare, in effect, that environmental problems will be solved only if humans all become saints. Orthodox might respond that that is precisely the point: on the level of ‘programmes’, we are talking about palliative measures which may solve one problem, but are more than likely to create new ones. Environmental problems, like social problems, are but symptoms of a deeper imbalance in our relationship with God, and therefore with all His creation.

## 7. Conclusion: A Deeper Ecology?

So we see once again the Orthodox instinct to go beyond questions of ‘what should we do?’ to explore root causes at the deepest level. Few Orthodox would welcome the suggestion that they share this quest with ‘deep ecologists’: compare Patriarch Bartholomew’s vehement objection that deep ecology ‘classifies humanity within the natural ecosystem’ and considers the human ‘of equal significance with every other living being’ (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 301; cf. (Bordeianu 2009, p. 107)). Yet even Bartholomew can talk elsewhere about the unique place of *all* creatures and objects, and of ‘begin[ning] to see our own place within nature’ as we recognise nature as a work of God (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 46). Defensive (over-)reactions to the ‘ecological egalitarianism’ of the Deep Ecology movement obscure the fact that ‘deep questioning, right down to fundamental root causes’ rather than ‘technological fixes ... based on the same consumption-oriented values and methods of the industrial economy’ (Drengson) is precisely the approach that typically comes out of the Orthodox tradition. Compare Bartholomew’s frequent insistence that no real protection of the environment can be based on the same utilitarian logic that has led to its destruction (e.g., (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 144)). And these congruences matter, because we are talking about intuitions that resonate with millions of environmentally concerned people who would never call themselves deep ecologists, and, equally, sometimes for the reasons sketched out at the start of this paper, would never identify themselves with Christianity either.

If Orthodox have a criticism of the ecocentric emphasis of the Deep Ecology movement, it is that this is still too shallow, and too narrow; one must also take account of the divine economy, which as Bartholomew says, ‘is always the solid support of ecology as a whole’ (Chryssavgis 2012, p. 141). This is what gives the natural world its ‘deep significance’ (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 267). The notion of natural systems being embedded in the divine economy, inasmuch as the process of salvation is ‘systemic and ecological in the broadest sense’ (Chryssavgis and Foltz 2013, p. 4), allows man to fit into the ‘system’ as the sort of creature he actually is: at once physical and spiritual, able to shape and transform his surroundings far beyond what is ‘natural’ to other creatures, yet called to ‘wonder humbly and obediently at the sacred laws *which govern the function of the microcosm* (i.e., man) *and the macrocosm*’ (Chryssavgis 2003, p. 335) (my italics). This very ancient and very important principle does not refer only to physical laws (which is obvious): the point is that physical, spiritual, and moral laws mirror each other because they come from the same source.

This theological insight should, and increasingly does, allow Orthodox to draw on the wisdom of the natural world (i.e., ecology) for guidance in how to live our lives, and not only on the level of ‘sustainability’. It allows us to see the natural world and its systems not just as something we take care of but as something we listen to, because it speaks to us of God who cares for all His creatures. To give the last word to another ‘green hierarch’ of the Orthodox Church, we can affirm that there *is* a path ‘through the creation to the Creator’ (Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia 2013).

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