

Patrology, Ecology, and Eschatology: Looking Forward to the Future of the Planet by Looking Back to the Fathers of the Church¹

Oleh Kindiy

Abstract

(Українське резюме на ст. 327)

Nearly a half-century ago in an infamous article, Lynn White Jr. accused Christianity of being complicit in environmental degradation, a claim that has met with widespread rebuttal. And yet, there are signs today of renewed ecological degradation in manifold forms, and peoples of all intellectual disciplines and backgrounds are struggling to respond to these challenges. Theologians have their role to play, and this article shows that there are deep theological resources within early Christianity addressing the goodness, stewardship, and salvation of God's creation. Drawing especially on the patristic literature of such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose of Milan, the author argues that we need today new forms of asceticism in addition to fasting from food that will help us forego excessive consumption and in so doing free us to draw into a deeper communion with all of God's creation.



¹ The article is part of a larger research paper that was written during the Fulbright Scholar Research Program in 2012–2013 at Aquinas College, Grand Rapids, MI.

Introduction

Recent descriptions of the modern ecological crisis are not optimistic.² It seems crucial that experts from different fields and backgrounds join their efforts together to find solutions together to our environmental problems. One source of insight that remains relatively underdeveloped is theology. This article will examine some common sources for Catholic and Orthodox theology, namely the teaching of the Church Fathers on the goodness of creation, ascetic interaction with nature, and an eschatological vision of the creation.³

A Modern Christian Apologia for the Environment

In 1967 Lynn White, Jr., an American historian, in his short but conceptual article, formulated a thesis that the roots of ecological problems derive from a Christian interpretation of the Bible.⁴ White contended that the Western Judeo-Christian tradition was responsible for obliterating all animistic beliefs that safeguarded trees, rivers, mountains, and other natural resources, thus leading to the loss of all inhibitions in the abuse of nature. As a result, people began to treat nature as being at the service of their needs and whims by means of science and technology. White also claimed that in the Book of Genesis the relationship between human society and the environment is presented as the relationship between dominator and dominated, and in this dualism it was God's will that people exploit nature.⁵ His thesis stirred a heated discussion

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Fourth Assessment Report*, ed. Rajendra K. Pachauri and Andy Reisinger (Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2008); see also Lloyd E. Sandelands and Andrew Hoffman, "Sustainability, Faith, and the Market," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 12 (2008): 129–45.

³ It is unfortunate that even though patristic sources are basically the same for Catholic and Orthodox theology, Catholic and Orthodox theologians who explore patristic views on the environment do not always read each other's studies.

⁴ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967): 1203–1207.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1205.

among historians, philosophers, ecologists, and theologians, and thereby became a stimulus for a deeper study of the subject from different points of view. Many refutations have been written since 1967,⁶ but the general trend to articulate criticism of Christian attitudes has not dissipated.⁷ Many secular environmentalists still contend that the Christian and Jewish religions are inimical to the environment and have been so for thousands of years.⁸ From the historical point of view, White was correct in some of his conclusions, but there is also much more evidence than usually acknowledged for more beneficent Christian attitudes toward the environment and non-human nature.⁹ White himself recognized that it was Protestantism and Catholicism that have permitted a “blatant disregard” for the environment, whereas some alternative developments within Christianity, like the one led by Francis of Assisi and

⁶ See John B. Bennett, “On Responding to Lynn White: Ecology and Christianity,” *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 5 (1977): 71–77; Jeanne Kay, “Human Dominion over Nature in the Hebrew Bible,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 79 (1989): 214–232.

⁷ See John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 3–40, 111–18; William Coleman, “Providence, Capitalism, and Environmental Degradation, English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 1203–1207; Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁸ Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 60.

⁹ Robin Attfield, “Christian Attitudes to Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 369–386. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson summarized several conclusions reached twenty years after the publication of White’s article: a) White’s description of biblical teaching regarding environment is selective and distortive; b) his view that Christianity paved way for scientific and technological revolutions is questionable; and c) his opinion that environmental destruction has flowed solely from the mindset of Western culture, and not from others, is historically dubious (“Why Christians Lost an Environmental Ethic,” *Epiphany: A Journal of Faith and Insight* 8 [1988] 40–50); see also Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology. Resources for Further Research* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006), 61–65.

perhaps the Eastern Orthodox traditions, are more environmentally friendly expressions of the Christian faith.

In this recourse to history, several important questions must be raised: how important is history, in general, and the history of Christian thought, in particular, for today, and how much of the past do we want to carry with us into the present and future, and how much of it must be left behind? It has been frequently reiterated that our contemporary understanding of the world, and hence our understanding of ourselves, has to a large extent been formed and conditioned by ancient history, philosophical categories, aesthetic tastes, religious stories, and cultural sensitivity. Some say that we are in a sense the progeny of ancient culture.¹⁰ In a Christian context, almost every church today looks to the first centuries of early Christianity to (re)discover its identity and charism.

At the same time, there is a strong conviction among many scholars that the Western literary, philosophical, and theological heritage and its powerful institutions need to be “demystified.” The ancient world, from the spread of Christianity in late antiquity and the Middle Ages up until the so-called Cultural Revolution of the 1960s in Europe and North America, has been branded as patriarchal, unjust, anti-environmental, and hegemonic. Thus some philosophers, social scientists, and even theologians ventured a call for “the liberation from the past” that discounts the old “mythological” way of thinking and social life style.¹¹ Some theologians have proposed that

¹⁰ There is an extensive literature on the subject, which deals with the notion of identity in antiquity. See Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard Miles, *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Barbara Aland, Johannes Hahn, and Christian Ronning, eds. *Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Allegory and Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981).

there is a clear need to transform Christian theology into an ecological theology. Ernst Conradie suggests that it is time to consider implications which the environmental crisis may have for Christian dogma and ethos and sees significant flaws in the Christian tradition, which constantly needs to be reformed.¹² He concurs with Kwok Pui-lan, who “calls for a ‘recycling’ of Christianity that will constitute a move from a hierarchical to an ecological model, from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, from a passive spirituality to a passionate spirituality, and from an ecclesial solidarity to an ecological solidarity.”¹³ From these considerations derive several trends in eco-theology that aim to revisit Christian traditional teaching about God, salvation of the world, and social ethical action. Among those trends I will just briefly mention three: a) the Earth Bible project that presents a renewed interest in creation theology, but even more so in hearing the voice of the Earth in the biblical text itself;¹⁴ b) the eco-feminist theology that liberates the expression of the feminine side of nature and describes the eschatological eternity as the return to “Mother Earth”;¹⁵ and c) the process theology that challenges the radical separation of the world from God, who is in some respect temporal, mutable, and passible.¹⁶

¹² Ernst Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology* 66; Dieter T. Hessel, Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xxxvii.

¹³ Kwok Pui-lan, “Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity,” in *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North*, David G. Hallman, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 107–11.

¹⁴ Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Aruna Gnanadason, “Toward a Feminist Eco-theology for India,” in *Women Healing Earth. Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 74–81; Chung Hyun Kyung, “Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality: Towards a Spirituality of Eco-feminism,” in *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North*, David G. Hallman, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 175–78.

¹⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 349; Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984), 20–26.

On the other hand, such philosophers and theologians as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wolfgang Iser, and Reimund Bieringer appeal to historical accuracy and focus their attention on the content of the ancient secular, religious, and philosophical texts with the realization that these can and even should be engaged in fruitful dialogue with the present by employing different interpretative tools.¹⁷ According to Gadamer, we need not strive to liberate ourselves from the past in order to be able to invent new senses of the biblical text, new theological concepts, and new programs for action in society.¹⁸ Rather, according to Gadamer:

time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted. Hence temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognize the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.¹⁹

Of course, it is up to the individual scholar, be it a historian or theologian or anyone else, to answer the question whether we seek to know about the past for its own sake or we

¹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004); Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Cf. Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 102–07; see also idem, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 20–31.

¹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 264f.

speak about it because we want to better understand the present while investigating distant times, cultures, or people by means of historical research.²⁰ But to apply Gadamer's insight to biblical and patristic exegesis, one might wish to suspend one's belief in faith-based claims "but it would be hermeneutically unsound to do so on behalf of the perspective described by the early Christian texts themselves."²¹ Jaroslav Pelikan put it in a different way:

the history of Christian doctrine is the most effective means available of exposing the artificial theories of continuity that have often assumed normative status in the churches, and at the same time it is an avenue into the authentic continuity of Christian believing, teaching, and confessing. Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.²²

Following Gadamer, Reimund Bieringer argues that Scripture and the works of the Church Fathers intrinsically contain what he calls "the normativity of the future," which is the hermeneutic key for interpreting texts from the past that enlighten our present and define our expectations for the future.²³

I have no intention to venture here into more justification of why biblical and patristic scholarship is necessary for modern debates about social and environmental problems. I would like to simply stress here that in the context of the teaching of the Catholic Church, both Scripture and Tradition, of which the teaching of the Church Fathers is an integral part,

²⁰ John Van Engen, ed., *Educating People of Faith. Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 5.

²¹ John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

²² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 9.

²³ Reimund Bieringer, "Texts That Create a Future: The Function of Ancient Texts for Theology Today" in *Reading Patristic Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges in the 21st Century Christian Social Thought*, Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, eds. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2010), 3–29.

are one revelation of the Word of God, and thus they are “like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (John 3:2).”²⁴ In addition, the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Churches has almost always articulated their teaching and positions founded on the Scriptures and the Church Fathers.²⁵

Status Quaestionis

A theological interest in environmental studies and the emergence of a separate field of eco-theology is obviously not simply a response to the critique of Christian attitudes toward the environment. It is often emphasized that the challenge of dealing with the ecological crisis is not only in the hands of scientists and politicians. It is also in the hands of religious leaders and theologians, who can contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue that has emerged over the phenomenon of human-forced climate change and can guide adherents of religious communities in acting sustainably.²⁶ As the global village becomes smaller, especially after dramatic ecological

²⁴ Vatican II Council, *Dei Verbum*, par. 7 (see www.vatican.va for official texts and translations).

²⁵ For the Orthodox understanding of the Tradition, see Vladimir Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” in *In The Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J.H. Erickson and T.E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 141–168 and George S. Bebis, “The Concept of Tradition in the Fathers of the Church,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 15 (1970): 22–55.

²⁶ Anne Bäumer-Schleinkofer, Manfred Büttner, eds., *Science and Religion = Wissenschaft und Religion. Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of History of Science at Hamburg-Munich, 1.–9. August 1989* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1989); Jame Schaefer, “Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good” in *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis*, Richard Miller, ed. (Maryknol, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 69–94. See also John Zizoulas, “Man the Priest of Creation. A Response to the Ecological Problem” in *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World. Orthodox Christianity and Society*, Andrew Walker and Costa Carras, eds. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), 178–88, at 187: “the political power and proposals for legislation cannot in themselves lead to a resolution of the ecological problem, without a widespread spiritual transformation.”

wake-up calls, such as the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989, the Mississippi Dead Zone, and the recent Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of 2011 to name just a few, the multidisciplinary approach is needed to raise environmental awareness around the planet and reform our behavior to make it more sustainable. Massive consumption, exploitation of non-renewable sources of energy, pollution, deforestation, over-fishing, and poor management of waste thrust upon us not only economic, social and political questions, but also problems that must be addressed by ethicists, anthropologists, and specialists in culture and theology.

In the United States, for example, representatives of the Jewish tradition, the Catholic Church, and other Christian denominations initiated the National Religious Partnership for the Environment dedicated to integrating care for the environment with social teaching, education, congregational life, and public policy initiatives.²⁷ Biblical scholars, historians of religion, theologians, and ethicists are examining their traditions, pointing to concepts that are inadequate for responding to ecological concerns, revisiting misinterpretations of biblical or other religious texts from which inappropriate conclusions have been drawn, and developing meaningful ways of addressing ecological degradation from their perspectives. In a word, we are witnesses to a “greening of religion” as Roderick Nash, a historian of environmental ethics, has characterized these efforts.²⁸ Perhaps such a “greening of religion” is most clearly seen in recent attempts on the part of several Eastern Christian theologians, including the Ecumenical Patriarch himself, to return to the Fathers and draw from them wisdom for a better stewardship of creation in our time.

²⁷ See www.nrpe.org.

²⁸ Roderick F. Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1989), 87. See most recent studies from different Christian theological groups, Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009); David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010); Tobias Winright, ed., *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011).

Select Church Fathers on the Salvation of Creation

A shift to the heritage of the Church Fathers that we witnessed during the twentieth century is reflected in writings of most of the prominent Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians today. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, the now-emeritus bishop of Rome Benedict XVI showed how in the early Church and in the following centuries, the Fathers recognized works of charity (*diakonia*) as expressing the deepest nature of the Church, along with preaching of the gospel and sharing the Eucharist.²⁹ I would like to use this statement as a starting point and suggest that environmental awareness is part of our concern about the wellbeing and sustainability of human society. *Diakonia* must be consciously extended to the rest of the created world beyond the scope of the human community for the very sake of the human community. One of the most quoted and commented eco-theological passage is found in Paul, who in his letter to the Romans declares that

creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.³⁰

Paul clearly shows the connection between the human fall and disharmony in the created world that followed the fall and at the same time the redemption of the human race that entails

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (available on the Vatican website). A good survey of ecological thought of Pope Benedict XVI can be found in the book edited by Jacquelyn Lindsey, *The Environment of Pope Benedict* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

³⁰ Romans 8:19–23.

the salvation of the entire universe, as is also supported by the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 21:1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”³¹ To the eschatological interpretation of the salvation of creation we shall return later. Here the biblical authors most powerfully capture the essence of the relationship between God and the world: “God so loved the world” – please note that John speaks of not just humankind but the cosmos, the entire created world – “that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16).³²

The ideas that human beings are alienated from nature and strangers in the cosmos and that spirit and matter are separate realities are not part of the early Christian and medieval *Weltanschauung*.³³ The Creator is beyond, and at the same time, within His creation.³⁴ The Church Fathers provide a cluster of biblical interpretations of the relationship between God and humanity, God and environment, humanity and environment, in very close interrelation and synergy.³⁵ Jame Schaefer in her

³¹ Cf. Is. 65:17; 66:22; II Peter 3:13.

³² Richard Cartwright Austin discussed the biblical sources for environmental theology and he points out that even though the Bible does not provide a fully developed environmental thought but it still gives the outlines of a cosmic and prophetic vision for the renewed appreciation of the created world, where the text of John 3:16 connects the themes of creation, salvation and eschatological vision: “Toward Environmental Theology,” *Drew Gateway* (1977): 1–14.

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy. The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 146–53.

³⁴ See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in *The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 73–80; Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation*, 52.

³⁵ There are some good introductory articles on the subject including Stephen Muratore, “Earth Stewardship. Radical Deep Ecology of Patristic Christianity,” *Epiphany* 10 (1990): 121–33; Fred Krueger, “Ecological Potential in Patristic Writings,” *Ecumenism* 134 (1999): 12–17; G.D.S. Smit, “Man and Nature – A Patristic Perspective on Ecology,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 14 (2003): 221–231; John J. O’Keefe, “Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection,” in *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis*, Richard Miller, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 49–68.

Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics points to nine such themes elaborated by the patristic and medieval authors that can be very helpful and illuminating for modern debates, and these are: 1) valuing the goodness of creation, 2) appreciating the beauty of creation, 3) reverencing the sacramental universe, 4) respecting creation's praise of God, 5) cooperating within the integrity of creation, 5) acknowledging kinship and practicing companionship, 6) using creation with gratitude and restraint, 7) living virtuously within the earth community, 8) loving Earth, and 9) modeling the human in an age of ecological degradation. On the other hand, many Orthodox theologians add one more important aspect to this list, namely, the priestly intermediary role of humans for the creation before God.³⁶ I would like to note some of the most crucial ones, namely the goodness of the world, a call to an ascetic and priestly life-style, and a common destiny of humanity and non-human creation in an eschatological perspective.

The Goodness of Creation

One of the biggest challenges for the development of Christian dogma in the first to fourth centuries was Gnosticism, which was a diverse religious movement of broad appeal in many places. Its adepts provided fascinating answers about the nature of God, the origin of the world, and the destiny of the human being, and how God, humanity and universe relate to each other.³⁷ The fundamental premise of Gnosticism was

³⁶ See Metropolitan John Zizoulas, "Man the Priest of Creation. A Response to the Ecological Problem" in *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World. Orthodox Christianity and Society*, Andrew Walker and Costa Carras, eds. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 178–88; Tamara Grdzeldze, "Creation and Ecology. How Does the Orthodox Church Respond to Ecological Problems?" *The Ecumenical Review* 5 (July 2002): 211–218; Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Creation and Priesthood in Modern Orthodox Thinking," *Ecotheology* 10 (2005): 344–363; Brother Aiden, "Man and His Role in the Environment," *Epiphany* 12 (1992): 24–40.

³⁷ The literature on Gnosticism is extensive. But see some of the most authoritative works on the subject by Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990); Harris J.

dualistic: there is always a constant warfare between good and evil, spirit and matter, soul and body. The Gnostic cosmological systems were extremely omnigenous, multifaceted, and complicated, but most of the Gnostic authors proclaimed that the created material world was the result of a cosmic spiritual tragedy, it was a mistake, and the sooner it disappears, or the sooner the soul is freed from the material body, the better. The only means for such liberation is the possession of the secret knowledge, the gnosis, which is accessible only to the elect people, who must be spiritual by birth.³⁸ For Gnostics, just as for Neo-Platonists who kept the hierarchical but still dualistic view of the cosmos, it was impossible to conceive the idea that the highest good, God, could become incarnate, i.e., descended from top to bottom and assume human flesh.³⁹

Among the early Church Fathers who condemned the doctrine of the evil nature of the created world were Irenaeus of Lyons (*Against Heresies*); Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*); and Tertullian (*Against Marcion* and *Against Valentinus*). They argued against Gnostics that the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament; God created the world and God's creation was good (Gen 1: 2–31); the same God who created the world also decided to save the world through His personal visitation. This latter soteriological

Glyndwr, *Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999); Stephan A. Hoeller, *Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2002); Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003).

³⁸ Harris J. Glyndwr explains that Gnostics divided the human race into three categories: people of body (somatics/hylics), soul (psychics), and spirit (pneumatics). Salvation was accessible only to people of spirit who possessed the inborn salvific seed/knowledge of the logos; some exceptions to the people of soul could be made if they worked hard on their purification and perfection, however, they still had no equal chance to be at the same level as the pneumatics (*Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices*, 103–07).

³⁹ Udo Schnelle (*The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998], 469–516) and many biblical scholars argue that John 1:1–14 represents partially an anti-gnostic polemic, in that it stresses that Jesus is the Eternal Logos, the Word, and that this Logos became flesh. Cf. also I Timothy 6:20 and I Cor. 2:10 as possible attacks on Gnostic heresy by Paul; as well as Rev. 2:24.

argument of the theology of incarnation was proclaimed at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea and later was defended by Athanasius of Alexandria in anti-Arian polemics.⁴⁰

The following generations of Church Fathers started from the idea of the goodness of the created realm. In his *De natura boni*, Augustine described the goodness of the world against his former companions, the Manicheans, and insisted that the world was created good, *ex nihilo*, by the “supremely good Creator” and every natural being “great and small, celestial and terrestrial, spiritual and corporeal” was also good.⁴¹ The categories of the “good” and “being” served Augustine as vehicles to conceive the “oneness” of created world, its inner structure, harmony and dependence upon God’s goodness, being, and unity. Augustine’s contemporary John Chrysostom was of the same opinion but warned his audience not to look at the goodness of the world only from a utilitarian perspective. He claimed that all creation is good intrinsically, including “not only plants that are useful but also those that are harmful, and not only the trees that bear fruit but also those that bear none; and not only tame animals but also wild and unruly ones.”⁴² The ontological goodness of the created world is stressed not only because of its instrumental service to the people who are nourished by it. Affective appreciation aroused

⁴⁰ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1. *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd revised edn. Translated by J. S. Bowden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965). See also John Meyendorff, “Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 27 (1983): 27–30.

⁴¹ Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good against Manichees (De natura boni)*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, selected and translated with introductions by John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) 326; also his *The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*, edited with a new introd. by Henry Paolucci (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1961), 10–11. Most quotations are taken from the available English translations, and where the translations were unavailable to the author, the quotations were taken from the Greek and Latin texts published in *Patrologia Graeca and Latina* edited by Jacques Paul Migne. On Augustine’s attitude toward nature see Arthur O. Ledoux, “A Green Augustine: On Learning to Love Nature Well,” *Theology and Science* 3 (2005): 331–44.

⁴² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 135–37.

by the beauty of creatures also contributes to perception of the intrinsic value of the world. Similarly, interest in the study of the diversity of the created world, and cognitive appreciation are precipitated by the contemplation of the harmonious functioning of the world.⁴³

Basil of Caesarea poetically expressed his delight in the beauty of species and vistas in his commentary on the *Six Days of Creation*. He attributed the goodness and the beauty of the world to the providence of God and to God's loving care for the human race even after the fall of the first people.⁴⁴ Basil emphasized the importance of the physical world for the faithful: "The world is a work of art, set before all for contemplation, so that through it the wisdom of Him who created it should be known."⁴⁵ For Basil, natural theology is not the only source of knowledge about God; it must be complemented by the study of Scripture and Christian tradition.⁴⁶ But Basil stressed the need to appreciate God's creatures for their inner characteristics and sacramental qualities, since as they live according to their nature, they manifest and praise God.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite explained the cohesive functioning of all creatures due to God's unifying love. The good God is the source of life and from Him all creatures receive soul and life, nourishment and motion. He causes all of His creation to grow, and through purification He renews it. God "loves all things in the superabundance of His goodness,"

⁴³ Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics*, 44.

⁴⁴ See Saint Basil, *On Hexaemeron*, in *Exegetic Homilies*, 3–150, trans. Agnes Clare Way (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963) 31–32; Letter 14 "To Gregory, His Companion," in *The Letters*, vol. 1, trans. A.C. Way (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1965), 46–48.

⁴⁵ Saint Basil, *On Hexaemeron*, 112.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *The "Unwritten" and "Secret" Apostolic Traditions in the Theological Thought of St Basil of Caesarea* (Edinburgh; London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 3. Ephrem the Syrian, a contemporary of Basil, in one of his emotional hymns, depicted God the Creator as painting a self-portrait through the Scripture and nature (*Hymns on Virginity and the Symbols of the Lord*, in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey [New York: Paulist Press, 1989], 386).

by which all things were made, are brought together in perfection, and are held together.⁴⁷

For many Church Fathers, the goodness, beauty, and sacramentality of the world are perceived even more profoundly through the prism of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to John of Damascus, God “became matter for my sake ... willed to take His abode in matter, [and] worked out my salvation through matter.”⁴⁸ His defense of icons is built on the premise that God filled matter with His grace and power, and therefore the wood of the cross, the mountain of Calvary, the rock-hewn tomb, the ink in the Gospel, the wooden board and colors of icons depicting the Savior and His saints are to be honored for their sacramental quality.⁴⁹

For many Church Fathers, especially for Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, everything that exists derives from and is sustained by God’s being which flows from God’s overabundant goodness, and everything returns to God because of His beauty (in Greek, the word for “beauty” is *kalos*, which stands at the root of another word *kalleō*, which means to call, to summon). The human realization of God’s goodness and consumption of the material goods that have been provided by God for our well-being must not only be merely appreciated and gratefully received. As the whole universe returns back to its origin, so also people must return their lives and their possessions back to the Creator, which is not only the act of the release of the spirit on one’s deathbed, but is also conducted throughout life.

⁴⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in *The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 79–80.

⁴⁸ John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 16–17, 23–26.

⁴⁹ See John Chryssavgis, “The World of the Icon and Creation: An Orthodox Perspective on Ecology and Pneumatology,” in *Seeing God Everywhere. Essays on Nature and the Sacred*, Barry McDonald, ed. (Bloomington, IN, 2003), 253–268.

Asceticism, Mediation, and the Priestly Vocation of the Human Person

It may be difficult to speak about the ancient Christian understanding of asceticism in the context of modern culture. Often asceticism is understood as a coercive invitation to consume less which in turn is perceived as the threat to economic growth. However, the true meaning of asceticism needs to be rediscovered in the age of uncurbed consumerism. Maximus the Confessor reminds us bluntly that it is not how much we need and consume, but rather the way we use the goods, that is crucial for our spiritual growth: “it is according to whether we use things rightly or wrongly that we become either good or bad.”⁵⁰ His words acquire a new resonance in the context of recent studies that show that 30–50% of all the food produced on the planet Earth is lost or wasted before it is consumed.⁵¹

Two centuries before Maximus, in his homily on fasting, Basil gave the following description of the fast, which restrains not only consumption of food, but also all aspects of human life, such as moderation in clothes, accessories, communication, sleep, laughter, management of money, political service, business administration, and most importantly a peaceful and forgiving attitude towards neighbors:

One fasting has a healthy complexion, not breaking out in a shameless, blushing redness, but moderation is adorned with paleness. One fasting has a gentle eye, a calm gait, and a thoughtful face. There is no intemperate, arrogant laughter, but rather fitting speech, and purity of heart.⁵²

⁵⁰ Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love*, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer et al (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 63.

⁵¹ Institution of Mechanical Engineers, *Global Food: Waste Not, Want Not* (Westminster, London: Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 2013).

⁵² Basil of Caesarea, *De Jejunio*, in *Patrologia Graeca* 31, col. 177.

Origen of Alexandria believed that God appointed people to rule the natural world as His partners,⁵³ and in his commentaries on the Book of Genesis, he described the meaning of human dominion over the created realm through obedience to God, and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ His spiritual disciple Gregory of Nyssa explained that human dominion over the visible, created world derives from having been fashioned according to the image and likeness of God, who is the ultimate Lord of everything that exists. But because of sin, humanity lost its original likeness to God, and thus this dominion is acquired by holy effort:

The human person must acquire kingship (dominion) by his own effort. We see the royal stature of the human person best in those who have become free by learning to control their own wills. When the human person wears the purple of virtue and the crown of justice, he becomes a living image of the King of kings, of God himself.⁵⁵

To conclude, a contemporary Christian ecological interpretation of asceticism goes far beyond the perception of fasting as merely a dietary restriction, focusing also on other practices such as consuming less energy, using fewer material goods, etc. In the past, ascetic practices were mostly confined to monastic groups who led an austere way of life. Today, by contrast, Christian asceticism must be exercised by all people in new forms such as learning about the damage done to the environment by the abusive exploitation of natural resources.⁵⁶ Modern asceticism presupposes also a higher appreciation of

⁵³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1965), 244–245.

⁵⁴ Idem, *Commentary on Genesis*, in *Origen. Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. by Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982) 68–71.

⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio, Chap. 4*, in *PG 44*, cols. 135–136.

⁵⁶ Cf. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, eds., *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 82.

the physical realm of the world. Yet most importantly, our society must revisit its economic, social, and governmental policies in terms of suitability, fair distribution of resources, and intelligent consumption of goods.

Through asceticism as the precondition for the renewal of the original image and likeness of God, the initial destiny of humanity comes again to the forefront, namely to be reunited with God: the Church Fathers used the technical term *theosis* or *deification*.⁵⁷ Deification, as it was understood by them, is a union with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory. The purpose of God creating human beings is to make them be able to participate in God's life, as Peter in his second letter explains: "Through these [i.e., God's glory and power], he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire" (II Peter 1:4). This should not be confused with a pantheistic view that creation and Creator become one. Athanasius of Alexandria was one of the first theologians who spelled out the Christian understanding of theosis in his famous phrase: "God became man, so that man might become a god."⁵⁸ But he also realistically recognized that "God is within all things according to his goodness and power, but outside of all according to his own proper nature."⁵⁹ Rather, the process of deification reflects the application of the Christological union of both divine and human natures as defined at the Council of Chalcedon – without confusion, change, division, and separation – to the realm of anthropology and eschatology.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See M. Lot-Borodine, *La Déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des pères grecs* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1970); Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), esp. 97–110; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, in PG 25, col. 192B.

⁵⁹ Athanasius, *De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi*, in PG 25, col. 441.

⁶⁰ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 232; von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 275.

The Church Fathers perceived the human person as microcosm and mediator between God and creation, and therefore the vocation of the human person was boldly designed to be the Priest of Creation. Ambrose claimed that “the human being embodies the whole universe.”⁶¹ Basil taught that the human being can “contemplate in himself, as in the microcosm, the wisdom of God.”⁶² Nemesius of Emesa wrote that a person stands on the borderline and is part of the mortal and immortal nature.⁶³ Theodore of Mopsuestia argued that human beings are celebrated because they are a cosmic essential connection.⁶⁴

These examples strongly indicate a belief that organic and inorganic nature and the human body are in complete unity. Therefore, as stated by Maximus the Confessor, together with the salvation of the human body, which was established in the life of Jesus Christ, the whole creation is set to be saved as well.⁶⁵ Maximus described the act of being the priest of creation in terms of liturgical ceremony, in which the priest takes bread, i.e., the whole world into his hands and “creatively integrates” it and offers it back to God.⁶⁶ In sum, Maximus, like other Fathers, regarded the world as sacred, but even more important they regarded the human being as the only possible link between God and creation, enabling him to bring nature into communion with God and sanctify it.

An Eschatological Perspective

Most of the ancient philosophical schools believed that the world is eternal: it does not have a beginning and therefore will have no end, only cyclical repetitions of chronological

⁶¹ Ambrose, *De Paradiso Liber Unus*, in *PL* 14, col. 288.

⁶² Basil, *Homilia De Gratiarum Actione*, in *PG* 31, col. 216.

⁶³ Nemesius of Edessa, *De Natura Hominis*, in *PG* 40, cols. 508, 512–513.

⁶⁴ Theodore of Mopsuesia, *In Genesim*, in *PG* 80, cols. 109–113.

⁶⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum Liber*, in *PG* 91, col. 1308C.

⁶⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones ad Thalassium* 51, in *PG* 90, col. 480B; idem., *Ambiguorum Liber*, in *PG* 91, col. 1305B.

ages.⁶⁷ The Jewish Second Temple literature of the second and first century BC and the early Christian literature of the first and second centuries are driven by the messianic belief in the quick end of the world.⁶⁸ Gnostics believed that the material world will end only after all particles of Sophia that got stuck in bodies of spiritual people will be released back to the Pleroma. Christians believed that after the ascent of Jesus to heaven he will very soon come to judge the living and dead and will establish the new world-order. Such Church Fathers as Tertullian and Irenaeus of Lyons read chapter 20 of Revelation literally and held the millenarian belief that after the end of the persecution of Christians there will be a thousand years of Christian rule over the nations, after which the devil will be released again, and only after this there will be the final judgment and the beginning of a new era.⁶⁹ However, as the second coming of Christ did not take place as early as was expected, many theologians of early Christianity provided a non-millennial interpretation of the *parousia* using the hermeneutics from the third chapter of the second letter of Peter. In this chapter the author expressed the belief that: 1) the second coming of Christ is not cancelled but only postponed because God “is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (v. 9); 2) “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day” (II Peter 3:8); and that the mission of Christians is to wait for and hasten the day of God (v. 12) by living in holiness and devotion (v. 11).

At the same time Peter invites his readers to hasten the end of the world by a holy life, preaching of the gospel, and

⁶⁷ See Katelis Viglas, “L’expérience de l’instant métaphysique: la contribution de Plotin au problème ‘éternité et temps,’” *Philotheos*, 6 (2006): 131–43.

⁶⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 131–46.

⁶⁹ See Josephine Laffin, “What Happened to the Last Judgment in the Early Church?” in *Church, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul. Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009) 20–30; see also Robert J. Daly, ed., *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

teaching others how to live in sanctity and sustainability. There are different Christian groups that speculate with an apocalyptic rhetoric and often use the ecological crisis as a definite sign of the Second Coming of Christ.⁷⁰ The critics of Christianity point out that the apocalyptic images of the immanent destruction of the world has biblical roots, as the Christian hope may have been understood as redemption *from* the earth and not *of* the earth.⁷¹ However, the destiny of the world doomed for annihilation is not the only Christian perspective. It is more characteristic of Protestant, or to be more precise, Lutheran theology, as Jürgen Moltmann pointed out, since the idea of total annihilation derived from the theology of the sixteenth century Lutheran preacher and scholastic theologian, Johann Gerhard.⁷²

Moltmann also presents several eschatological perspectives: that of the transformation of the cosmos and the deification of the same. The transformative perspective of the end of the world is more characteristic of the Catholic and Calvinist traditions based on the views of Irenaeus, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and present-day Catholic dogmatics. Unlike the perspective of annihilation, which seems to discount the physical world and opts for the salvation of human persons and not their bodies, the perspective of transformation presents a gradual positive growth of human civilization into the Kingdom of Heaven. This transformation implies a certain moment of change of society from the old quality to a new one at a certain historical moment in time, which is called the Second Coming of Christ.⁷³ But the apocalyptic imagery of the passage from the old earth and old heaven to the new earth and new heaven is conceived mainly in terms of social transformation of the earthly Jerusalem into the heavenly Jerusalem.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ernst Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology*, 175.

⁷¹ For the discussion of this issue, see Catherine Keller, "The Heat Is On: Apocalyptic Rhetoric and Climate Change," *Ecotheology* 7 (1999): 40–58.

⁷² See Moltmann, *The Coming of God* 268–270.

⁷³ Such gradual growth, connection, and distance between human progress and the Kingdom of Heaven is presented in a very judicious way in *Gaudium et Spes*, no.39.

The perspective of the deification of the cosmos, on the other hand, which I briefly touched upon earlier, is more characteristic of the Greek and Syrian Church Fathers and is currently held by the contemporary Eastern Orthodox Churches.⁷⁴ The deification of the world presupposes that all human beings exist within the community of all other created beings. This view is part of the Byzantine tradition based on the neo-Chalcedonian reading of the hypostatic union of Christ as conceived by Leontius of Byzantium and especially Maximus the Confessor.⁷⁵ Dumitru Staniloae explains that because of a hypostatic bond between the person and nature, the human being is saved, transfigured and deified, and consequently the environment and the entire realm of the created world must be saved, transfigured, and deified.⁷⁶ The union between God and creation, like the union of divine and human natures in Christ, means that they are joined together in an “unmixed” and “unchanged” manner in the realm of human society and its activity.⁷⁷ The implications of such a perspective are very close to the one of transformation but with a stronger emphasis on the engagement of the human body and the entire physical cosmos.⁷⁸

In conclusion, through visiting important aspects of a holistic, patristic, cosmic theology it is hoped that it has become more apparent how the ancient Church can help us rediscover a theology and an ethos that will help both Western and

⁷⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 270–275.

⁷⁵ Maximus, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, in *PG* 90, col. 621AB. Cf. also John Zizioulas, “The Book of Revelation and the Natural Environment,” in Sarah Hobson and Jane Lubchenko, eds., *Revelation and the Environment AD 95–1995* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 1997), 19.

⁷⁶ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, vol. I (Köln, Gütersloh: Benzinger, 1985), 294.

⁷⁷ Brock Bingaman, “Orthodox Spirituality and Contemporary Ecology. John Cassian, Maximus the Confessor, and Jürgen Moltmann in Conversation,” in Timothy Hessel-Robinson and Ray Maria McNamara, eds., *Spirit and Nature. The Study of Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Urgency* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 98–124; at 116.

⁷⁸ See Dumitru Staniloae, “The Foundation of Christian Responsibility in the World: The Dialogue of God and Man,” in *The Tradition of Life. Romanian Essays in Spirituality and Theology*, ed. A.M. Allchin (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1971), 53–73.

Eastern Christianity have a stronger voice and impact in environmental debates. We have looked at the causes that have led Christianity to be blamed for the environmental crisis and have noted that the main reason seems to be both in the criticism of Christianity from the outside but also in that the Church may have lost its awareness of the importance of material creation.

One important means through which the wisdom of the Church Fathers contributes to the environmental situation is through prayer and its ascetic tradition. As Christians we believe in the necessity to intercede for our environment. In the mystagogical terms of Maximus it means that we must intercede for its deification. The ascetics are known for their devotion and practice of incessant prayer. We recognize in the Desert Fathers an affinity and deep respect for nature. They serve as a model for the Church and for others through their prayer life and close relationship to God as well as their ability to live in harmony and cooperation with nature.

We have seen how creation, in light of the legacy of the Church Fathers, is very much seen as a gift from God and that the survival of the planet lies in the act or the event of its communion with God. It has become apparent that the patristic vision of nature is a dynamic one in which human society has an all important role to play in this process as mediator of God's presence. The essence of the patristic concept of priesthood is seen as bringing the world into liturgical communion with God. This essay has tried to show that the views of the Fathers have much to offer in providing common ground for ecumenical dialogue that can bring Christianity to the forefront of global environmental debate and also to bring those disillusioned by what they see as an irrelevant Christianity, detached from environmental concerns, to an awareness that the ancient Church holds hope for the future with her holistic and cosmic theology in which the world is seen as a conductor of divine grace.



Резюме

Майже півстоліття тому Лінн Вайт молодший у своїй сумнозвісній статті звинуватив християнство у співвідповідальності за екологічну деградацію. Стаття викликала широкий спротив. Проте сьогодні бачимо всі ознаки відновлення екологічної деградації у різноманітних її проявах, а представники всіх інтелектуальних дисциплін стараються відповісти на ці виклики. Богослови можуть відіграти тут свою роль, і ця стаття показує, що в ранньому християнстві існують глибокі богословські ресурси, що говорять про добро, порядкування та спасіння Божого творіння. Посилаючись на патристичну думку, а саме: Іринея Ліонського, Климентія Олександрійського, Тертуліана, Атанасія Олександрійського, Йоана Золотоустого, Василя Кесарійського, Діонісія Ареопагіта, Йоана Дамаскіна, Максима Сповідника, Орігена Олександрійського, Григорія Ніського, Амвросія Медіоланського, автор стверджує, що сьогодні нам, окрім посту від їжі, потрібні нові форми аскетизму, які допоможуть освободити від надмірного споживання і тим самим звільнять нас для глибшого спілкування з усім Божим творінням.