

CHRISTIANITY AND CARE FOR CREATION:
LIVING OUT OUR FAITH IN OUR DAILY LIVES

An Independent Learning Project

Presented by

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To

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education
with a concentration in Humane Education

Cambridge College
Cambridge, Massachusetts

2005

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July 2005

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Abstract

This Independent Learning Project includes a booklet entitled, “Christianity and Care for Creation: Living out Our Faith in Our Daily Lives.” It is meant to address common misconceptions about the Christian faith and to illustrate Christians’ responsibility to be loving stewards of God’s creation. It will illustrate the natural connection between humane education and Christian teachings.

The booklet is targeted toward a Christian audience, and covers the interconnected aspects of animal protection, environmental ethics, cultural issues and human rights, from a Christian perspective. It intends to respond to common misconceptions about the Christian faith in relation to these issues. The goal of this booklet is to share ways in which humane education can serve as a vehicle by which Christians can become aware of and respond to suffering and injustice in the world.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIANITY AND CARE FOR CREATION: Living Out Our Faith in Our Daily Lives

This booklet is designed to address humane education issues from a Christian perspective. It is designed to clear up misconceptions and distortions of the Christian faith in regard to our relationship with other people, other species, and the environment. While the issues of suffering and exploitation in this world are vast and innumerable, this booklet is intended merely to be an introduction as to how, as Christians, our daily choices can have a positive impact on this world and can more accurately proclaim the Gospel to all of God's creation.

Format of the Project

The issues of humane education are interconnected and sometimes difficult to separate. Therefore, in order to make this booklet more approachable for the reader, it will be divided into several sections. Sections will include: God Saw That It Was Good; Sharing Creation with the Cosmos; Restoration of Perfection on Earth; Our Calling to Be Caretakers of Creation; Proclaiming the Gospel; Humankind's Failure to Be Good Stewards; Worshipping God, Not Creation; Ways to Help Repair the Damage; Eternal Hope; and Recommended Resources for Compassionate Living. In the "Ways to Help Repair the Damage Section," the booklet will give examples of how we can make choices of food, clothing, transportation, household products, and entertainment that are more compassionate to God's creation, and a better reflection of the true essence of the Christian faith.

CHRISTIANITY AND CARE FOR CREATION:

Living Out Our Faith in Our Daily Lives

“A merciful heart is one that burns with love for all creation – for men, for the birds and animals... for every created being. And by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears, from the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation.”

- St. Isaac the Syrian¹

GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

In the beginning of the Old Testament of The Bible, when God created the heavens and the earth, there was a perfect co-existence between humans, animals, and the environment. God said that everything He created was good (Genesis 1:31), and He gave humans the responsibility to care for creation (Genesis 1:28). As Andrew Linzey, who holds the world’s first post in Christian theology and animal welfare at Oxford University, stated in his book, *Animal Gospel*, “...order and harmony and peace is God’s original will for creation.... A world in which all creatures, animate and inanimate, sentient and nonsentient, human and nonhuman, exist in perfect unity before their creator.”²

To this day, the natural world continues to be a place of healing and inspiration for people. Simply taking a walk in the woods or along a beach brings a sense of tranquility and awe to our souls. Spending time with an animal can bring one comfort

beyond words. St. Gregory of Nyssa, a 4th century Christian saint, recognized that “...when [one] considers the universe, can anyone be so simple-minded as not to believe that the Divine is present in everything, pervading, embracing, and penetrating it? For all things depend upon [God] who is, and nothing can exist which does not have its being in [God] who is.”³ One can sense the sacredness of creation simply by experiencing its indescribable beauty.

In the natural world, we have an opportunity to experience the fullness of God. “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1: 19-20). The power, glory and majesty of God becomes evident to us in God’s creation. “It is mystery and miracle beyond all imagination”⁴ All of life has value, because God has created it out of His boundless love.

SHARING CREATION WITH THE COSMOS

Many Christians focus on the importance of human beings at the expense of the rest of God’s creation. This is a distortion of the true meaning of John 3:16 in which it is stated that “God so loved the world.” The original Greek translation of the word “world” means “cosmos,” not just human beings. Tony Campolo, a modern Christian writer and environmentalist, described this as “...refer[ing] to anything and everything that is in the universe, including the animals, flowers, insects, and fish – God loves them all. It also includes the land and the oceans and the air we breathe.”⁵

While God may hold the greatest love for people, we cannot ignore the fact that God loves the rest of His creation as well. Dr. John Habgood, the Archbishop of York

noted that "...the whole creation also reflects His glory."⁶ We share life with the cosmos. "All creation proceeds from the creative, generous hand of God. Human or non-human, animate or inanimate, we all share the profound beneficence of God in his creative work."⁷

RESTORATION OF PERFECTION ON EARTH

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...; And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:1,4

God loves the world so much that He sent His son to earth so that the world might be restored to its original, uncorrupted state once again. He loves the world He created so much that He will eventually restore it to its original perfection. "The ultimate result of the work of Christ is that all of nature and all of humanity will be giving God glory and worshipping Him throughout all eternity."⁸ The peace and harmony that existed in the beginning will eventually return to creation. "We do not know precisely how God in Christ will restore each and every creature. But we must hold fast to the reality witnessed in Christ that our creaturely life is unfinished reality – that God is not yet finished with us."⁹

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

Isaiah prophesied that one day there would be peace throughout creation. But he did not say that we should sit idle while waiting for that day to arrive. Some Christians

live their lives with great anticipation of the new world to come, but do not put much consideration into the fact that our daily actions are contributing to the destruction of God's creation. While it is wonderful to live with such faith and hope in God's promises for our future, we cannot forsake the world in which we live now. Although life as we know it in this world is temporary and fleeting, we should not live our lives as though we are merely passing through. We need to live our lives in a way which helps to bring healing to God's creation, and to share the good news of the Gospel. Linzey described this eloquently when he said:

Christians should never say that this world as it is, is all that we have to contend with and that God is satisfied that we stay as we are. For creation is a dynamic entity; it belongs to a dynamic God who has not yet finished with his creation. If we cannot see it whole, one reason has to be that it is not *yet* whole.... The Church must learn time and time again that its task is not to *make* the world the kingdom, but to be faithful to the kingdom by showing to the world what it means to be a community of peace.... We need to consider how far we are *now* capable by the power of the Spirit of living free of violence and making peace with creation.¹⁰

While we are here on earth, awaiting the day when God will restore all of creation to its original created beauty, out of a love for God and the gifts God has bestowed upon us, we should be devoting time and energy to helping to manifest a better world, helping to heal some of the scars which we have inflicted upon the world which God has given to us.

OUR CALLING TO BE CARETAKERS OF CREATION

“Have dominion over the fishes of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:28)

The focus of the faith of many Christians continues to be solely upon human beings and their relationship to God and to other people. They have come to believe that, since God has given us dominion over creation, the natural world and the life within it is meant to be used as we see fit. This teaching is a distortion of the concept of “dominion,” which really calls us to be loving stewards of God’s creation. As Patriarch Bartholomew, a spiritual leader of the Orthodox Church, stated, “Dominion is a type of the Kingdom of Heaven.... where corruption and death are no more.”¹¹ He went on further to say that, “the ‘dominion’ and ‘rule,’ then, with which we humans are entrusted, is specifically an expression of the divine image within us. In our relationship to creation we are to reflect God’s wisdom and His loving compassion. ‘Dominion,’ therefore, does not mean domination, and ‘rule’ does not signify and arbitrary tyranny.... [they] denote responsible stewardship.”¹²

Furthermore, in Genesis 1:26, God created humankind in His image and likeness. “All of God’s creations were spoken into existence primarily to glorify Him.... He has given us the awesome responsibility of caring for His creation so that it can go on praising Him until the end of time.”¹³ Would a loving God subject His creation to suffering and exploitation? Clearly it follows that, as stated by the Evangelical Environmental Network, “...human beings have a special role and a special responsibility in God’s creation since they are created in God’s image and have free will. Human beings are called to care for the rest of God’s creation, not abuse and destroy it.”¹⁴

The life of Jesus is a powerful testament to how we should live our own lives. Jesus calls us to be gentle and merciful when he states, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful,” (Luke 6:36) and “Blessed are the merciful” (Matthew 5:7).” While we do have God-given authority over God’s creation, our God is a loving God, and as Linzey stated, “...if full weight is given to Christ as our moral exemplar, our power cannot be understood as legitimate except as service, which is necessarily costly and sacrificial. Lordship without service is indeed tyranny.”¹⁵

Ancient Christian tradition, and the life and teachings of early Christian saints, held that *all* of creation is sacred and should be treated as such. Joanne Stefanatos, an Orthodox Christian writer, noted that “Many of the Saints were visionaries, who knew from experience the reality of man as he was intended to be. They taught that the original state of Adam was man’s natural state, and that the present state of corruption after the Fall is unnatural.”¹⁶ We have much to learn from the examples of the life of early Christians.

Yes, there are many issues to deal with in the church; however, we should take more time to concern ourselves with environmental and animal concerns. Such concerns should not be viewed solely as secular issues. While we live in the midst of a fallen world, we can still take steps to make changes which bring the world back into closer harmony with the perfection God originally intended and for which we are called to strive toward in Matthew 5:48 (“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.) and in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:10 (“Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”). “Human beings are both co-partners with the rest of

creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with the responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all creation.”¹⁷

The Gospel calls us to be responsible and loving stewards of God’s creation. Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope John Paul II, in their “Declaration on the Environment,” stated, “We have not been entrusted with limited power over creation, we are only stewards of the common heritage.”¹⁸ As such, it is our responsibility to care for and to protect creation, working to beautify it until the day when God will restore it all to a state of perfect harmony once again.

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Mark 16:15

Some Christians use the excuse that, since we live in a fallen world, it is pointless to try to mend what has gone wrong, that because of the sin of humankind, we will continue to make mistakes in our relationship with other people, animals, and the environment. So, instead, they work on their personal relationship with God and await the day when God will take them into the kingdom of heaven. Campolo noted that “Those who hold this opinion suggest that all we Christians can do is tarry patiently until the trumpet sounds and the Lord returns to set everything right again. This kind of thinking often promotes a kind of passive quietism that makes being a Christian nothing more than a quest for personal holiness that will render us ready for ‘that great day.’ . . . this kind of theology can get people to throw caution to the wind and act irresponsibly,”¹⁹ creating what he deemed “a Christian version of ‘eat, drink, and be merry’.”²⁰ As Christians, however, we are called to live by Christ’s example.

We choose to exclude some of God's creatures from sharing in His blessings. We make daily choices that inflict harm and suffering upon God's creation. In these ways, we neglect to carry out Jesus' desire for us to "proclaim the gospel to every creature." Reverend Basil Wrighton, a Catholic priest, noted that "What we call 'Christian civilization [sic]' falls lamentably short of the humane standard of the gospel."²¹

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray that "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It follows that, "in anticipation of His coming, we must go to work today and participate with Him in caring for all parts of His creation, making our contribution to the work which He will complete on the day of His coming (Philippians 1:6)."²² We should live our lives as a testimony of our faith in God. "In dealing with our stewardship responsibility for creation, we must acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of creation by what we say and sing, and also by what we do. People should know by our work and lives that we follow — in word and deed — the Son, who is beautiful Savior *and* Lord of creation."²³

Mark 16:15 calls us to "preach the gospel to *every* creature." God's love is not limited to man. It would be difficult to imagine or to believe in a God who would condone mistreating the life He had made manifest and that He loved completely. When God created the cosmos, He declared that it was good, and God loves all of His creation. "At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the dream of universal peace, a world where humans are no longer violent and cruel to other creatures."²⁴ Not only are we called to proclaim the gospel to other people, but our actions should be demonstrating the gospel to all of life upon earth, including people, animals, and the natural world.

Although we will never attain perfection in our ways of being, we are called to “be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect.” Such a way of life should involve continual striving to improve our relationship with God and all of God’s creation. “We should so behave on earth that our testimony to our Creator is clear. We should so behave on earth that heaven will not be a shock to us.”²⁵

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Ephesians 5:8-11

Although we cannot purchase our salvation through deeds, out of a deep and abiding sense of love to the Lord of all Creation, we should be living our lives in a way which demonstrates our love for God. We should be shining out light and truth and goodness into the world. Out of our love for God, we must repent from the pollution, suffering, and destruction we have inflicted upon God’s creation. As this booklet will demonstrate, there are many ways in which our everyday choices can demonstrate a more compassionate and loving relationship with the gifts of creation which God has bestowed upon us.

HUMANKIND’S FAILURE TO BE GOOD STEWARDS

Adam and Eve broke their covenant with God, and we continue to do so today when we participate in the destruction of God’s creation. It is not just the secular world that is to blame for the problems that fill the world today. Unfortunately, Christians are

just as guilty as those in the secular world when it comes to being a part of the destruction of the natural world.

The actions of humankind have contributed to the depletion of natural resources; the endangerment and extinction of plant and animal species; the pollution of water, air, and soil; and the suffering and exploitation of both impoverished peoples as well as animals. Pope John Paul II noted that “Human ingenuity seems to be directed more towards limiting, suppressing or destroying the sources of life...than towards defending and opening up the possibilities of life.”²⁶ As a result of our greed and materialism, we have subjected God’s creation to immense suffering. As Campolo noted:

“We who were given the capacity to express love in creation and to participate with God in maintaining His universe have disobeyed our calling. We who have been charged to share with Him in lifting up all of nature to that higher stage... have turned from this mission and used our Godgiven power to tear apart what God has put together. We who were created to be sons and daughters of the God who makes things one, have become the agents of the powers of darkness and have joined the Evil One in wreaking havoc on God’s creation.”²⁷

Instead of being careful, loving stewards of God’s creation, we cause harm to creation. Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope John Paul II admonished Christians for their actions, or rather inaction, when they noted that “If we examine carefully the social and environmental crisis which the world community is facing, we must conclude that we are still betraying the mandate God has given to us: to be stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom.”²⁸ Through our pursuit of riches,

failure to love our neighbor, destruction of the earth, and lack of communion with animals, we are complicit in the suffering of creation.

Pursuit of Riches

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Luke 12:15

Rampant consumerism plagues the modern world. Everywhere we turn, it seems that we are bombarded with messages to buy, and to have more, bigger, and better material things. Christ, his apostles, and Christian saints however, teach us to live in a different way.

Christ teaches us that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). He also cautions that people should not "lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Christ reminds us that we "cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Jesus also displayed His disgust and anger about the commercialization of worship when He turned over the money changers' tables outside of the temple (Matthew 21:12).

St. Paul also reminds us that,

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing,

with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:6-12)”

God tells us that we are not to worry about food & shelter, etc., but to know that He will provide those things for us. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). The early Christian saints, as well as Christian monks, nuns and ascetics today, lived a life of prayer and simplicity, and God calls for us to fast. Yet, all too often, greed, not God, becomes the leader in our lives. “In fact, seventy percent of us visit malls each week, more than attend houses of worship.”²⁹

Pursuit of material riches has affected the quality of our relationships with our children. “...On average, Americans now spend nearly seven times as much time shopping as they do playing with their kids.”³⁰ Children have also become victims of corporate interests in profits, as they are specifically targeted in marketing campaigns. “Research indicates that six-month-old babies are already forming mental images of corporate logos and mascots. By the time they are three years old, most children are making specific requests for brand-name products.”³¹

Quality time with our spouses has suffered as a result of the pursuit of more “stuff,” as well. “Some studies suggest that over the past generation, the time parents spend with their children has declined by as much as forty percent. One study found that American couples now find just twelve minutes a day to talk to each other!”³²

Even the sacredness of Christmas has been marred by the lure of materialism. The Religious Coalition to Take Commercialism Out of Christmas noted, “We have seen the spirit of Christmas reduced to a carnival of mass marketing. Consumption has taken on an almost religious quality; malls have become the new shrines of worship.”³³

Not only does this affect our families, but “... we must also be mindful of how our addiction to consumer goods is devastating the planet.”³⁴ A tremendous amount of natural resources are being used in order to fuel our insatiable desire for more “stuff.” “The developed countries of the world hold 25 percent of the world’s population but consume 75 percent of all energy, 79 percent of all commercial fuels, 85 percent of all wood products, and 72 percent of all steel production. They also generate nearly three-fourths of all carbon dioxide emissions. Americans – even the poor – consume far more oil, gas, coal, aluminum, iron, water, wood, and other resources than did our ancestors or than do people in both developing and developed nations.”³⁵ Our love of “stuff” is causing harm to God’s creation.

Our quest for more and more “stuff” affects not only our own families, but also families who we will most likely never meet. Our desire for great bargains drives corporations to contract work out to many people who work in sweatshops in order to produce these goods at a cheaper price. Adults and children in lesser-developed countries often work under harsh conditions, for long hours in order to produce clothing, toys, and

electronics, etc., for the western world which they themselves would never be able to afford.

Modern society encourages dissatisfaction and tells us that what we have is not enough or not good enough. Through the ubiquitousness of mass marketing, led by corporations that are driven by profit, we are led to believe that we need something newer, better, more. “America’s 102 million households...currently contain and consume more stuff than all other households throughout history, put together.”³⁶ While there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to enjoy life, what is wrong is directing more of our energy toward accumulating things as an end to themselves as opposed to directing our energy toward seeking truth and goodness and communion with God’s creation.

As Christians, we should be standing against injustice, and letting making conscious choices about how we spend our money that take into account the suffering of people and the rest of God’s creation. Our actions should bear witness to our love of God and the world which God created. It is not enough to simply say that we love each other. We must demonstrate that love through our daily actions. We must “walk our talk,” so to speak. As Joanne Stefanatos, an Orthodox Christian and author of “Animals and Man, A State of Blessedness” noted, “If our priorities are right, we will understand that life is not for the acquisition and accumulation of material goods, but for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Holy Spirit purifies, sanctifies, and transfigures human nature, so that it is deified.”³⁷

Loving Our Neighbors

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:37-39

Jesus calls us to love our neighbor. One might ask, "Who is our neighbor?" Our neighbor does not have to be someone we know. It does not have to be someone we may pass on the street one day. Our neighbor includes those who we may never even meet. "...what happens anywhere in creation must be of interest to believers. And if our neighbor's house — or the forests of Brazil or Surinam — is on fire, a person should be allowed to 'pull the alarm' without being considered extreme or called an 'alarmist'."³⁸

The decisions we make on a regular basis have effects that extend beyond our own selves and our own families. Each decision that we make has a ripple effect that reaches other people, animals, and the planet. Although we may not consciously be making decisions with intent to harm, some of the decisions we make have harmful effects on God's creation. As Patriarch Bartholomew stated, "God is love and has created us in his image to love like God. Therefore, our relationship with creation should be based on respect and justice."³⁹ It is important to reflect upon whether our daily choices demonstrate our love for God and our love for our neighbors.

Some might argue that, by placing an emphasis on care of creation, we are ignoring the needs of people. However, in our pursuit of self-gratification and materialism, we cause undue suffering upon other people outside of our own families as

well. For it is often the poor who endure the most suffering when we wreak havoc on God's creation.

In search of a greater profit margin, corporations are increasingly outsourcing their labor to third world countries where workers are paid slave wages and suffer from physical ailments as a result of their work. Kevin Bales, author of a book about modern-day slavery described how “Major economic changes of the last ten years have pushed global business into greater contact with the oppressed, even enslaved, workers.... The overarching and compelling logic of always using the cheapest raw materials worked by the cheapest labor now drives corporations across borders.”⁴⁰ Many of the things we purchase were made outside of the United States by people, including children, who work under horribly inhumane conditions. For example, Craig Kielburger, a young man who has devoted his life to bringing an end to child slavery, noted that “Children working in the carpet industry often suffer from many health problems. These include breathing difficulties from inhaling the carpet fibred, arthritis in their fingers from tying the tiny knots, and growth deformities from working hunched over their looms for so long every day.”⁴¹ And, Sweatshop Watch, an organization that works to end the injustices of sweatshops revealed “a 2003 National Labor Committee report on a Honduran worker sewing clothing for Wal-Mart at a rate of 43 cents an hour.”⁴² The bargain prices we pay at discount stores come at a cost for the people who suffer to make those bargains possible.

Even in the U.S., sweatshops exist. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor found that 67% of Los Angeles garment factories don't pay workers minimum wage or overtime.”⁴³ The exploitation of other people for consumer goods may be hidden to us,

but unfortunately, it does exist. “If we have not indirectly participated in slavery through investment, we almost certainly have through consumption. Slave-produced goods and services flow into the global market, making up a tiny but significant part of what we buy.”⁴⁴

Workers in factory farms and slaughterhouses are subjected to dangerous conditions. OSHA considers jobs in the meat-, poultry-, and fish-processing industry to be “among the most hazardous in America.”⁴⁵ Often, these workers are often minorities and immigrants who are paid poverty wages.

Workers in slaughterhouses are subjected to a work-life that, by its nature, devalues life. Workers in this kind of environment learn to view animals as objects. Many times, the desensitization to violence that is learned on the job at slaughterhouses is carried home with the workers where they become angry and abusive toward their families as well. One man who used to work in a slaughterhouse killing pigs noted that he “was kicked, bitten, stabbed in the forearm, had a tooth knocked out, an eardrum punctured, and finally got [his] face slashed.”⁴⁶ He believes his experiences there caused problems in his marriage and recalled how he would “blow up at the drop of a hat, come home every night and find something to complain about, take [his] frustrations from work out on [his] family.”⁴⁷ Eventually, he started hitting his wife and his children. Since he left the plant, he has repaired and healed the violence in his family. If we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, we simply cannot condone being a part of this.

Destruction of the natural world also creates situations that will often affect the poor before others. A spokesperson for Earth Trends, an organization that collects information about the interconnections between environmental, social and economic

trends affecting the world, noted that “The poor have unique concerns relating to the environment and are disproportionately vulnerable to adverse environmental conditions.... Droughts, crop failures, deforestation, climate change, and other forms of environmental disruption all disproportionately harm the poor because they lack the resources to cope with the challenges these events create or to adapt to these situations as they arise.”⁴⁸ Therefore, in order to demonstrate a love for our neighbors, we should consider how our choices result in environmental problems that disproportionately affect our neighbors who are living in poverty. For “...it is they [the poor] who are paying the higher price for our planet in peril. It is in their communities that landfills are being located, toxic wastes being dumped, incinerators being built, highways cutting through to create mega thruways that won’t serve their needs.... And it is not only poor people in this country but whole nations in the Third World who now must destroy their resource base, their forests and soil, to repay debts to the rich First World, debts not fairly acquired and long since repaid.”⁴⁹

We are called to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Luke 6:31), and that whatever we do to the least of Jesus’ brethren, we do to Him. Christ also calls us to care for those who are poor (Matthew 25:37-40). It is the poor who end up working in the vile working environment of slaughterhouses, and on farms where they are exposed to toxic levels of pesticides. It is also the poor who work for slave’s wages to create clothing and material goods for the middle class and wealthy. And it is the poor who lose their land and suffer from the effects of droughts and famines so that people in wealthier nations can feast off of the meat of cattle who end up being raised on that land. We are also told that whatever we do to the least of Jesus’ brethren, we do to Him. As Linzey

noted, “The weak, the powerless, the disadvantaged, the oppressed should not have equal moral priority but greater moral priority. When we minister to the least of all we minister to Christ himself.”⁵⁰

We are called to, “be imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us” (Ephesians 5:1). The way we live our lives in this world should be a testament to our love for our Creator. Father Vladimir Berzonsky, an Orthodox priest, spoke of how “Love is a gift from God, a sacred grace that invites us, indeed challenges us to respond with whatever capability we have within us to love God, one another and his creation.”⁵¹ We can make a huge difference in this world if we begin to take seriously God’s commandment for us to truly demonstrate our love for God and our love for our neighbors.

The Earth is the Lord’s

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell within.”

Psalm 24:1

Creation is the Lord’s. It is not ours to use as we see fit, but is a gift from God which should be honored, cherished and protected from undue harm. Our lives should be an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving for the blessings we have received from the Lord of all creation. We should treat the earth with kindness as the loving stewards which God calls us to be. However, as Don Gwillim stated so well, “The problems related to the destruction of the environment are severe, yet we as Christians do not seem to care, even though we were commissioned by God to be good stewards. We have

refused to separate ourselves from a world that is driven by selfishness & greed, a world that is raping God's creation to the detriment of future generations."⁵²

The *Orthodox Study Bible* noted that "... ecological irresponsibility is a form of moral wickedness."⁵³ And Patriarch Bartholomew has declared that "...to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin."⁵⁴ Yet we cause so much pollution and degradation of the natural world. We fill our air and waterways with pollutants from factories, gasoline, landfills, etc. We saturate the ground and our food sources with pesticides. We pump hormones and antibiotics into animals that we eat. We support factory farming systems that pollute the water and subject animals to incredible suffering.

Water covers 75% of the earth. We rely upon water for our survival. Yet we continue to pollute our waterways. Modern farming practices and manure from factory farms contribute to nitrates leaching into the groundwater. Pesticides from farms, yards, and leaks in landfills contribute to pesticides entering the groundwater. Chlorinated solvents from manufacturing processes and petrochemicals from underground storage tanks also continue to contaminating the groundwater system.⁵⁵

"As world population continues to increase, water scarcity will affect two out of every three people by 2025, according to UN estimates."⁵⁶ Global warming could also contribute to a decrease in water availability as a result of higher evaporation rates and more usage of water for drinking, bathing, and watering plants. Yet many of us continue to take our water source for granted by being wasteful with water. "On almost every continent, many major aquifers are being drained faster than their natural rate of recharge."⁵⁷

Our demand for paper products and for beef feeds the increase in the amount of logging on lands both in the United States and abroad. “Over the past half century the earth’s vast green mantle of forests has been reduced to tattered remnants. As the world’s population has grown from 2.3 billion in 1950 to 6.3 billion today, some 3 billion hectares (ha) of the world’s original forest cover – nearly half – has been lost. The destruction continues: in each of the last dozen years, about 14.6 million hectares of forest – an area the size of Nepal – has been cut, bulldozed, or burned.”⁵⁸

The elements in air, carbon dioxide and oxygen, are vital to the existence of life on earth. However, we continue to release pollutants into the atmosphere from sources such as factories and automobiles. “... industrialized countries account for roughly 80% of the carbon dioxide buildup in the atmosphere to date.”⁵⁹ And while global warming is something about which most of us are aware, and even though “...2,000 of the world’s most eminent scientists signed a statement saying global warming will be a catastrophe,”⁶⁰ this does not seem to have affected the way in which we live our lives. For, “the United States is [still] the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases.”⁶¹ To be true to our Christian faith, we should be concerned about how we utilize the natural resources which God has provided us for our survival.

The amount of waste we generate and send to landfills is tremendous, and has monumental effects upon the health of the planet. “Each year our great industrial machine churns out, per person, one ton of hazardous waste, fifty tons of other solid waste, and a great deal more wastewater, carbon dioxide, and other garbage. In addition, each person produces about a ton of solid waste and thousands of gallons of waste water.

Of the 20,000 U.S. landfills in use in 1979, 15,000 were filled up and closed by 1992. As cities ran out of landfills, they began feeding their garbage into incinerators, which may release into the air such toxic chemicals as mercury, cadmium, and PCB's and leave behind small mountains of toxin-filled ash."⁶² Yet in our addiction to material goods and to "easy" living, we continue to contribute more and more to the waste stream. When God created the cosmos, He said it was "very good." What would God's reaction be to the way in which Christians have filled it with waste?

Our food choices also have an effect upon the environment. "Compared with a nutritionally equivalent intake of whole grains, 'red meat is responsible for 20 times the land use (because of cattle grazing), seventeen times the common water pollution (because of animal wastes), five times the toxic water pollution and water use (from chemicals applied to feed grains and water for irrigation and livestock), and three times the greenhouse gas emissions (from greater energy use)."⁶³ Farm animals produce an amount of waste that is 130 times greater than that of humans.⁶⁴ Pollutants from factory farms enter the waterways, contaminating groundwater and subjecting fish to harmful bacteria. "Forests, wetlands, and other natural ecosystems and wildlife habitats have been decimated and turned into crop and grazing land."⁶⁵

"The earth is a part of our flesh, inseparable from our story and destiny. For 'everything that breathes praises God' (Psalm 150:6)."⁶⁶ We should consider the effects of our actions when we make daily purchasing and lifestyle choices. For, as Patriarch Bartholomew stated, "if we remain indifferent to humanity's injustice against the earth and its resources, if we are not involved in the correction of the abuse we cause to our planet, then we do not properly reflect God's care and concern for us and the whole

world.”⁶⁷ Instead of continuing to waste water and pollute the waterways, decimate the forests, contribute to the emission of greenhouse gases, and overflow landfills with garbage, Christians should be taking steps to heal the harm that has been wrought upon God’s creation.

Communion with the Animals

“...ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you. And the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.”

Job 12:7-9

“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all His works.”

Psalms 145:8-9

Animals and Christian Tradition

Some Christians also hold the view that animals do not have souls and will not go to heaven; therefore, we have no duty or obligation to them. Early Christian teachings and traditions, however, portray animals as companions to human beings. God created the animals to glorify life. God created the animals, plants, and all living things and made a covenant with them.

Most people are aware of the connection that St. Francis of Assisi had with animals; however St. Francis is not the only Christian saint to have this type of relationship with animals. Many Saints of the Church lived a life of communion with animals and the natural world, just as Adam and Eve had originally lived. “St. Basil the Great prayed for the salvation of man and beast, St. Chrysostom urged the duty of kindness to animals and St. Isaac the Syrian spoke of the core of piety as the ‘charitable heart’ which is revulsed by animal suffering of any kind.”⁶⁸ Elder Athanasius protected the lives of roe-deer, foxes, snakes, and wolf cubs. Saint Thecla and Saint Prisca both connected with lions who were set upon them to kill them for refusing to renounce their faith in Christ.⁶⁹ Saint Martin of Tours was also merciful and compassionate toward animals. In one instance, he protected the life of a hare who was being chased by hunters.⁷⁰

There were also some early Christian saints who lived as hermits in the forest or in the desert. Elder Zosima, a monk who lived as a hermit in the Siberian forests, peacefully coexisted with the animals in the forest. He wrote about “...how the experience of the goodness of God in His creation helps draw the desert-dweller to his Lord...,”⁷¹ noting that, “in a word, every occasion, each object seen and heard turns one to contemplation on the omnipotence, the wisdom, the goodness of God – how He, to all of creation, gave its particular abundance, comfort and enjoyment.... each living kind, according to its nature, in its own voice raises praise of thanksgiving to God Who created it.”⁷²

Saint Paul of Obnora also lived a life of communion with animals in the forest. Another monk, Sergius, heard of the life that Paul was living and went to visit him.

Sergius witnessed Saint Paul feeding birds who were perched on his body. Meanwhile, a “nearby stood a bear, awaiting his food from the desert-dweller; foxes, rabbits and other beasts ran about , without any enmity among themselves and not fearing the bear.

Behold the life of innocent Adam in Eden, the lordship of man over creation, which together with us groans because of our fall and thirsts to be delivered into *the liberty of the children of God* (Rom. 8:22).”⁷³

Animals were present even in the life of Christ. Just as Adam lived in communion with the animals before the Fall, so did Jesus live in communion with the animals during his life on earth. Christ was born in a stable, with animals surrounding him. When Christ entered into Jerusalem, he freed a donkey and a colt that had not been tamed. No one other than him had been able to ride upon these animals (Matthew 21:2). And in Revelation, when Christ returns to the earth, he comes upon white horses from heaven.

It is not just human beings who will be saved, but *all* of creation will eventually be brought into eternal harmony with God. “To believe in Jesus is to believe that the cosmos is loved and blessed by God.... It is in the process of being reconciled and will ultimately be redeemed. The whole creation groans and suffers, awaiting the revelation of the children of God who will help to release it from its bondage and futility.”⁷⁴ Human beings will be joined with the animals in heaven, worshipping God together. All of creation will eventually be redeemed and restored to peace and beauty, to the way in which God originally intended for creation to be before humankind’s fall into sin. Paradise will be restored. St. Maximos the Confessor said, “Man is not a being isolated from the rest of creation; by his very nature he is bound up with the whole of the

universe.... In his way to union with God, moan in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together in his love the whole cosmos disordered by sin, that it may be transfigured by grace.”⁷⁵ These things are confirmed by the Apostle John who wrote of the final victory of God over evil and described the eternal Kingdom where “...every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them” (Revelation: 5:13) was worshipping God.

Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote in his Homily 81 that, “A merciful heart is one that burns with love for all creation – for men, for the birds and animals, for the demons, for every created being. And by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears, from the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation.”⁷⁶ True Christian dominion of God’s creation involves people as loving caretakers of the gifts which God has bestowed upon us, not a warrant to use and abuse creation as we see fit.

Modern-Day Treatment of Animals

Yet we subject animals to immense pain, suffering, and death. “Irresponsible stewardship of God’s creation and our greedy exploitation of natural resources have wrought the unbelievable suffering that seems evident everywhere in the animal kingdom.”⁷⁷ We raise animals under cruel conditions for their fur. Factory farming conditions deprive animals of the ability to live in a natural environment. Massive slaughterhouses process animals in ways which compound further their suffering. We take animals from the wilderness and place them in cages or manipulate them to

“perform” in circuses all for the sake of human amusement. Still, as noted by Father Vladimir Berzonsky, “...we remain ignorant of the abusive ways we treat animal life.”⁷⁸

While God did permit us to eat meat after the Fall, this was done as a concession for man’s weakness. It was not a commandment that we were required to eat meat. “There is no assumption that animals should be viewed simply as human property, as appendages to human interests, or indeed that humans should have absolute rights over them. If God is the Creator of all, it must follow... that everything created belongs to him alone.”⁷⁹ Since animals are God’s creatures, we are called to be loving caretakers of them. For, “To be cared for by God and to care for God’s creation entail showing compassion for every living being and for every living thing.”⁸⁰ However, the way in which most animals are raised for food today is simply unconscionable.

Raising animals for food has become a system that puts profits above the welfare of animals. The number of animals killed each year for food is astounding. “One hundred and one million pigs are slaughtered each year in the United States. Thirty-seven million cattle and calves. More than four million horses, goats, and sheep. And over eight *billion* chickens and turkeys. In all, annually in the United States farmers produce 65 billion pounds of cattle and pigs and beef, 46 billion pounds of chickens and turkeys, and 80 billion eggs.”⁸¹ And the lives each of these animals endure until they end up on our dinner plates cannot be reconciled with a Christian ethic of mercy and compassion.

Factory Farming

Birds

In factory farm conditions, laying hens “live in a cage with a floor space only about twice the dimensions of a regular phone book. Four or five hens share this space.”⁸² Often, between seventy and one hundred thousand chickens are housed in one large, commercial shed.⁸³ “More than 99 percent of the hens who lay the eggs eaten in the United States are debeaked and kept in cages where the excrement from the birds in the upper tiers collects above them, often falling through onto their heads.”⁸⁴ They are deprived of natural sunlight. They do not get to lie down, to spread their wings, or to bathe in the dust as they would in their natural environment. Their beaks are removed with hot knives so that they will not resort to pecking each other to death as a result of their stressful environment. Many birds succumb to broken bones, paralysis, or death due to the amount of calcium their bodies lose from laying too many eggs.⁸⁵ Male chickens, since they cannot produce eggs, are disposed of by suffocation, grinding them alive, or by merely throwing them in a dumpster to suffocate or starve to death.

When their bodies are too diseased or unable to produce any more eggs, they are sent to slaughter, destined to have their bodies ground up into soups, or low-grade chicken products which camouflage the bruises of their flesh. “In one notorious case of extraordinary cruelty at Ward Egg Ranch in February 2003 in San Diego County, California, more than 15,000 spent laying hens were tossed alive into a wood-chipping machine to dispose of them.”⁹² The owners of the farm were excused in court, because this method of killing was deemed to be a common practice in the egg industry. How can we eat eggs at Easter as a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a celebration

of life, when the animals who produced those eggs endured a life of suffering and eventual death in order for those eggs to be produced?

Turkeys and chickens who are raised for meat do not fare much better. “Nearly 10 billion chickens and a half a billion turkeys are hatched in the U.S. annually.”⁸⁷ After they are hatched, we cut off the end of their beaks in order to prevent them from fighting against each other due to their cramped housing conditions. “This is done without pain killers or anesthetic despite the fact that the beak is a sensitive organ with a rich nerve supply.”⁸⁸ Each chicken has less than a half a square foot of space, while each chicken is given less than three square feet of space. Such cramped conditions infectious diseases. Genetic manipulation has been used to cause these birds to grow much quicker than is natural for them. Their bodies become crippled due to the excess weight they need to carry, and this excess weight predisposes them to heart disease as well. During all kinds of weather, the birds are transported to the slaughterhouse on the back of trucks that are open to the elements. Once they arrive, they are hung, alive, upside down on a moving rail. Then, they are dipped into electrified water to immobilize them in order to make the slaughtering process quicker. Although stunned from the electrified water, they are still conscious and still able to feel pain. Sometimes the mechanical blade designed to slit their throats, misses birds. Those birds pass through the scalding tank, designed to remove the feathers of dead birds, while still alive and are literally boiled alive. A signed statement by an employee of a Tyson chicken slaughterhouse, whose job was to hang the chickens upside down into shackles states, “Our line runs 182 shackles per minute. It is physically impossible to catch them all. Therefore, they are scalded alive. When this happens, the chickens flop, scream, kick, and their eyeballs pop out of their heads.”⁸⁹

Every year, forty-five million turkeys are killed for Thanksgiving.⁹⁰ Our actions are contrary to the fullness of Christian love when we participate in this suffering by continuing to celebrate such holidays around the bodies of animals who have endured a life of suffering.

Pigs

The vast majority of pigs are also raised in intensive confinement conditions on factory farms. In the United States, approximately 100 million pigs are raised for slaughter.⁹¹ These highly intelligent animals often go crazy under these conditions; therefore, their tails are cut off without anesthesia in order to prevent them from biting each other's tails. They commonly contract respiratory disease due to the "dust, dander, and noxious gases, which are produced as the animals' urine and feces builds up inside the sheds."⁹² Not only pigs suffer from the poor air quality in these buildings, but sixty percent of the people who work in these buildings suffer from breathing problems as well.⁹³

Female pigs are subjected to a life of constant impregnation and birth. They endure this life unable to even turn around or lie down in comfort, because they live in metal pens that measure only two feet wide. After nursing their piglets for only two to three weeks, the piglets are taken away to be fattened for slaughter, and the sow is impregnated again. When a sow is no longer able to bear children, she too is sent away for slaughter.

Conditions of transport and slaughter are similar to that of birds. Many die during transport due to the overcrowding and temperature extremes to which they are subjected during transport. Once they arrive at the slaughterhouse, they are shackled by one leg

and hung upside down on a moving line. While they are supposed to be stunned prior to being bled to death, "...stunning' is terribly imprecise, and this results in conscious animals hanging upside down, kicking and struggling, while a slaughterhouse worker tried to 'stick' them in the neck with a knife."⁹⁴ Due to the speed of the line, some pigs are not properly stunned or bled and end up being boiled alive in the scalding tank. Just as Jesus Christ suffered innocently for Christians as He hung upon the cross, and many martyrs suffered innocently for the sake of their Christian faith, pigs are also innocent victims, suffering needlessly at the hands of their oppressors. Yet, in spite of all that pigs endure in factory farms, many Christians still celebrate the resurrection of Jesus around the dead flesh of a pig who has endured immense suffering.

Cows

The bucolic image of cows grazing on an open pasture often obscures the reality of the life which cows often endure. Many of these small dairies are being replaced by intensive dairies. In order to produce milk, dairy cows are subjected to a life of constant impregnation and birth. Genetic manipulation allows for cows to "...produce 100 pounds of milk a day – ten times more than they would produce naturally."⁹⁵ This results in many diseases, such as mastitis, Bovine Leukemia Virus, Bovine Immunodeficiency Virus, and Johnes' disease, being common in dairy cows. It is also common for the cows to suffer from potentially fatal metabolic disorders due to the super-rich diet they are fed to help them to produce such high quantities of milk.⁹⁶ The abuse inflicted upon these animals' bodies makes "downed cows," cows who are too weak or sick to stand, a common occurrence. These cows have been found to be "ragged with chains or pushed with tractors or forklifts, practices that cause injuries ranging from bruises and abrasions

to torn ligaments and bones.”⁹⁷ Since these animals are no longer profitable, they are often left to die a slow and painful death, because humanely euthanizing them would be too costly.

Male offspring of dairy cows are either raised for meat or become a part of the veal industry. The veal industry is no kinder than the dairy industry. Female cows born to dairy cows are raised to produce milk, while male calves are either raised to be slaughtered for meat or for veal. About one million calves are confined to two-foot wide crates each year.⁹⁸ In these confined spaces, they are unable to turn around or to even lie down in comfort, so that their muscles will not develop and their flesh will be tender. They are fed a liquid milk-free substitute that is deficient in nutrients in order to give their flesh a light color. At only eighteen to twenty weeks old, they are slaughtered.

The popular slogan about how milk “does your body good” obscures the reality of the life that dairy cows and veal calves (as a natural “byproduct” of the dairy industry) lead in order to provide people with their milk. It obscures the reality that human beings are the only mammal that drinks the milk of another species. As Christians, our lives should radiate love toward God’s creation. However, many Christians continue to believe it is benign to drink cow’s milk or to dine on the flesh of cows who have often endured a life of unnatural suffering and death. This is difficult to reconcile with the nature of life which God intended for the creatures He so lovingly created.

Fish

Often times, eating fish is looked upon as harmless to the fish as well as healthier to people than eating animals such as cows. However, the fishing business is not as harmless as most people would believe. Today, the increased demand for fish is resulting

in the depletion of wild fish in the oceans. “Over the latter half of the 20th century, wild catches have increased by approximately 500% to nearly 100 million tons per year.”⁹⁹

Due to the increased size of the nets and fishing vessels, many non-targeted sea animals are accidentally caught and are discarded back into the water either dead or in the process of dying. “Every year, approximately 100,000 seals, whales, and porpoises become entangled in fishing net and fishing line and drown.... Thousands of sea turtles are also inadvertently killed by nets meant to catch shrimp. Millions of birds suffer the same fate.”¹⁰⁰

An increasing number of fish are being raised on fish farms in order to meet the growing consumer demand for fish. “The quantity of farm-raised fish has doubled over the past decade.”¹⁰¹ Fish are raised in overcrowded conditions and often suffer from disease or suffocation. To combat the amount of excrement in their water, agrichemicals are pumped into the water and food in order to fight off diseases. Factory farmed fish endure suffering akin to their farmed animal counterparts. They are starved for days or weeks before transport so as not to contaminate the water during transport. When the time for slaughter arrives, “They may be removed from water and placed on ice or the water may be drained so that they slowly suffocate. Alternatively, farmed fish may be electrocuted in a large tank, or killed by a blow to the head.”¹⁰¹ In defense of the practice of eating fish, many Christians might say that Jesus and his disciples ate fish. However, two thousand years ago, in a Mediterranean fishing community, the conditions for fish destined for the dinner table were much different than the conditions in which many fish live their lives today.

Sheep

It is common in Christian teachings to use sheep as an analogy of the relationship between people and God. Such analogies bring to mind loving relationships between people and sheep. Today, however, in an age in which the rearing of animals is becoming more of an industrialized business, the living conditions of sheep are a far cry from what they were during Biblical times. Sheep are increasingly being raised in close proximity in feedlots or in confinement systems. The extreme seasonal temperatures result in many deaths. Approximately 100,000 died as a result of these causes in 1994.¹⁰² Much of the world's wool supply comes from sheep who are raised in Australia and New Zealand. In fact, 30% of the world's wool supply comes from Australia.¹⁰³ In these countries, sheep raised for wool are also subjected to the process of mulesing in which folds of their flesh are cut off, without the use of anesthesia, in order to prevent blowflies from laying eggs in their skin, even though alternative prevention methods do exist. When the sheep are no longer useful for wool, they are transported to slaughter. In spite of the suffering that lambs endure, many Christians continue their tradition of eating lamb as a means of celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Not only do we subject animals to a life of suffering so that we can please our palates, but we also subject animals to unnecessary suffering for entertainment, for clothing, and for cosmetics.

Animals as Entertainment

Zoos capture animals from the wild and then attempt to find ways to breed them in captivity. Once held captive in zoos, animals are deprived of living out their lives as they would in a more natural setting. According to Mercy for animals, "Birds' wings

may be clipped so they cannot fly, aquatic animals often have little water, and the many animals who naturally live in large herds or family groups are often kept alone or, at most, in pairs. Natural hunting and mating behaviors are virtually eliminated by regulated feeding and breeding regimens.”¹⁰⁴

Animals raised as food for the exhibit animals are often killed in cruel ways. “According to one zoo volunteer, killing methods include neck-breaking and ‘bonking,’ in which zookeepers place ‘feed’ animals in plastic bags and slam their heads against a hard surface to induce fatal head injuries.”¹⁰⁵ When animals are no longer useful for the zoo, they may be sent to farms where hunters pay to kill them, killed for their meat or hides, or sold to circuses. While there are some zoos that make room for animals who are truly in need of refuge, “reintroduction programs rarely work because captive animals no longer possess the skills for survival.”¹⁰⁶

Circuses are portrayed as colorful, happy lively places where animals voluntarily perform tricks for people. This portrayal is nothing but a deception to lure people to the circus. The animals are captured from the wild and trained by means of violent punishment to perform tasks that are far from natural for them. Bullhooks and electrical shocks are permitted by the Animal Welfare Act, and “it is standard practice to beat, shock, and whip animals to make them perform.”¹⁰⁷ They spend almost the entire year traveling from city to city in small cages in which they can barely move. Elephants are often kept in chains for 95% of their life.¹⁰⁸ Climate extremes which vary greatly from those to which they are naturally accustomed sometimes result in the death of animals. For example, a lion cub named Clyde died while being transported through the Mojave Desert by Ringling Brothers Circus. Although the lion’s caretaker warned his

supervisors that the animal was in danger, they would not stop the train.¹⁰⁹ It is no wonder that some animals eventually lose control. A Florida police officer who shot a circus elephant to death after she had lost control expressed it best when he said, “I think these elephants are trying to tell us that zoos and circuses are not what God created them for... but we have not been listening.”¹¹⁰

Many Christians and non-Christians alike look at zoos and circuses as a great, wholesome way to spend time with their families. However, patronizing such places directly supports the infliction of suffering upon God’s creatures. While it is wonderful to spend quality time with one’s family, patronizing animal circuses cannot be reconciled with the Christian ethics of mercy, love, justice, and compassion.

The Fur Industry

Seeing animals in the wild or watching videos of animals in the wild brings a sense of awe and enjoyment to many people. However, some animals are deprived of the freedom of living out their lives in the wild. The fur industry subjects once-wild animals to a life of intensive confinement. “Eighty-five percent of the fur industry’s skins come from animals living captive on fur factory farms.”¹¹¹ Animals are housed in cages where they are not protected from the elements, and the intense confinement subjects them to diseases. Since the animals are being raised for their fur and not for their meat, fur ranchers rarely use veterinary care in order to save on costs. These animals are killed by methods that will not harm the fur. They are either electrocuted through their anus, poisoned with strychnine, gassed in decompression chambers, or have their necks snapped. Sometimes they are not gassed completely and will wake up while being skinned alive. We have many alternative ways to keep ourselves warm in the winter. In

regard to the fur industry, Campolo states, “Causing unnecessary pain in the animal kingdom is a sin. People lose something of their humanity when they destroy life in order to provide items of luxury for the affluent.”¹¹² Christians are called to be merciful and kind. Wearing or buying fur is clearly an unnecessary cruelty.

Animal Testing

Marjorie Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison* provided powerful illustrations of how animals are treated as unfeeling objects. She noted that “Animals are used extensively in commercial product testing. They have been strapped into simulated car-crash devices, impacted repeatedly to test brain damage at different velocities.”¹¹³ And while alternatives to animal testing for cosmetics and other products do exist, some companies continue to subject animals to tests where the animals are forced to inject toxic substances or have chemicals applied to their skin and eyes. Animals are sentient beings. They can feel pain just as you and I can feel pain. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy, authors of a book which provided documented research about the emotional lives of animals, noted that, “In laboratories they suffer, as anybody who has heard them moan, cry, whimper, and even scream knows.”¹¹⁴ However, “while billions of tax dollars are spent each year to literally torture animals – supposedly for our benefit – many *humans* in this country lack access to even basic health care and nutrition.”¹¹⁵

In spite of all of this suffering, many people still choose to turn a blind eye to what these animals endure, and “we distance ourselves more and more from animals as we use them in increasingly bizarre ways.”¹¹⁶ As Christians, we should, instead, be crying out for justice and compassion for God’s creatures.

Most of us are blessed to be able to choose whether or not to be complicit in the suffering of animals for food and clothing. As Andrew Linzey once said, “The truth is that human beings can now approximate the peaceable kingdom by living without killing sentient beings for food. Whether this has always been possible is something about which, at worst, I am doubtful; at best, I have an open mind. But whatever the past complexity, I believe that we should now rejoice at the fact that so many of our human contemporaries can live without killing sentient beings in order to eat – and eat well.”¹¹⁷ We can easily make choices for entertainment and warm clothing that do not exploit animals, and it is possible to purchase products that have not been tested on animals. It is incompatible with a love of God to turn a blind eye to the suffering we are inflicting upon God’s creation. “The infliction of suffering on innocent, defenseless beings, human or animal, is nothing less than intrinsically evil... to stand for Jesus is to stand for the Christ-like innocence of animals, against the intrinsic evil of cruelty.”¹¹⁸ Instead of choosing to turn a blind eye to the suffering of these animals, we can refuse to be a part of this suffering. We can live full and healthy lives without being a part of inflicting suffering and death upon God’s creatures.

WORSHIPPING GOD, NOT CREATION

“Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! Love the animals, love plants, love everything. And if you love everything you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love.”

*Father Zossima*¹¹⁹

It must be emphasized that, by honoring God's creation, we are not worshipping creation. The nature of God is made manifest in God's creation. By honoring God's creation, we give testimony to the beauty, power, and divine nature of God. "...We must not let our zeal to avoid idolatry prevent us from our biblical call to care for all of creation. Indeed, one cannot fully worship the Creator and at the same time destroy His creation, which was brought into being to glorify him. Worshipping the Creator and caring for creation is all part of loving God."¹²⁰

WAYS TO HELP REPAIR THE DAMAGE

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."

Ephesians 5:8-11

Food

"What we eat, where our food comes from, and how we eat are all expressions of our embeddedness in the fabric of creation and therefore an expression of our vision and our faith. As such, food can be seen as a sacrament." - Michael Schut, Earth Ministry¹²¹

Throughout the ages, food has been a means of bringing people together. Families and church communities to this day gather together at mealtime, sharing stories, celebrating special events, and taking the time to be close to each other. Unfortunately, there is little discussion within the Christian community as to where the foods we place on our plates and in our stomachs have originated from, or whether our food choices are a reflection of God's original intentions for peace throughout creation.

While God did permit us to eat meat after the Fall, this was done as a concession for man's weakness. It was not a commandment that we were *required* to eat meat. Conditions for animals raised for human consumption on factory farms today are horrific. Since animals raised for food suffer terribly in modern factory farms, shouldn't Christians be taking a stand against this suffering by making more compassionate choices?

The life of suffering these animals endure until they end up on our dinner plates cannot be reconciled with a Christian ethic of mercy and compassion. Needless suffering is not what God intended for creation. There are many tasty vegetarian meal options which do not harm animals. Lessening our dependence upon eating of animals is one way in which Christians can demonstrate their love for God and for God's creation.

Purchasing locally grown or organic foods can also lessen the impact of our food choices upon the environment. Even simple thing such as reusing bags or bringing your own cloth bags to the grocery store and purchasing foods with less packaging can help to ease our burden on the environment.

"In its dailiness, eating is also an element of our lives which we have some measure of control. Environmental and social concerns often seem so global that it is easy to feel disempowered, but in reality each of those concerns is shaped by the choices of many individuals. In our daily food choices we can, and we do, 'make a difference'."

Michael Schut, Earth Ministry¹²²

Clothing

In the Western world, we live in a sea of seemingly endless choices. Often times, we base our purchasing decisions upon price tags, not taking much time to think about

how other people, animals, and the environment are affected by the clothes we wear.

One way Christians can demonstrate their love for God's creation is by making conscious choices about the clothing which we purchase.

People suffer in sweatshops to produce clothing for the affluent in other countries. Animals also endure needless suffering so that people can wear their furs or their skins. We can choose to make more compassionate choices which demonstrate our love and thankfulness for the gifts of creation which God has bestowed upon us. Buying second hand clothing, clothing made from organic cotton or other natural materials, and refusing to purchase animal skins or furs, or clothing which was made in sweatshops are all examples of how we can make more compassionate choices in this area.

Transportation

These days, everything in the world seems to be moving quicker and quicker. We work long hours at jobs, run countless errands and often seem to have little free time left for relaxation. The automobile has become not only a means of quick transportation, but also a symbol of status and prestige. It has become a standard and integral part of most family's lives. However, the automobile is one of the greatest causes of environmental pollution.

As Christians, we can work to decrease our dependence upon and usage of the automobile in order to maintain our God-given role as loving stewards of God's creation. This does not mean that we must give up our cars completely. However, by walking, bicycling, carpooling or using transportation instead of driving; consolidating trips; driving at reasonable speeds; or using hybrid or fuel-efficient cars or alternative sources

of fuel; we can decrease the amount of adverse effects that automobiles have upon the environment.

Household Products

The average person uses a large amount of different cleaning and personal care products. Many of these products contain toxic ingredients which are harmful to the health of humans and the environment. Often times, these products are also created and produced at the expense of animal's lives. Although alternatives do exist, many companies still subject animals to product testing. Animals suffer through ingesting chemicals or having them applied to their skin. Once the testing is done, the animals are killed and discarded, for they are no longer necessary.

We can demonstrate our love for the animals God created by choosing to purchase products that do not contain toxic ingredients or animal ingredients and have not been tested on animals. Such products are readily available in most any store. Many of them have labels specifically noting that they contain more natural ingredients and are cruelty-free. It is also possible to obtain lists of companies that no longer test on animals and products that are free of animal cruelty.

Entertainment

Circuses, zoos, rodeos, animal acts and animal races manipulate and exploit animals for human entertainment. There are many alternative forms of entertainment that are much kinder to God's creation. Circuses such as Cirque du Soleil involve only voluntary human participants. There are also many excellent documentaries that show us the beauty of animals in their natural surroundings. We can also encounter animals while taking walks in the forest.

ETERNAL HOPE

”Far too long have we limited our understanding of community, reducing it to include only human beings. It is time that we extend this notion also to include the living environment, to animals and to trees, to birds and to fishes. Embracing in compassion all people as well as all of animal and inanimate creation brings good news and fervent hope to the whole world.”

Patriarch Bartholomew¹²³¹

Most people would agree that we desire something better for this world, something better for our children. “The world is a place of beauty and wonder, and...our task as stewards is to act with reverence and compassion, mindful of our responsibility to future generations and of the need to share justly with others that which belongs to all alike.”¹²⁴ We are able to make alternative choices for the betterment of God’s creation, yet we either refuse to make personal changes, or we turn a blind eye to the suffering and exploitation in the world.

“It is always the easier approach to lay blame on Western development and technological progress for the ills that we confront in our world... What is more difficult – and yet at the same time more noble – is to discern the degree to which we constitute part of the problem itself. Just how many of us examine the foods we consume, the goods that we purchase, the energy that we waste, or the consequences of our privileged living? How often do we take the time to scrutinize the choices that we make on a daily basis, whether as individuals, as institutions, as parishes, as communities, as societies, and even nations?”¹²⁵

Yes, this world has been corrupted by the sins of humankind, but we are called to repent from our sinful ways of life. “The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual.”¹²⁶ While no single person is responsible for bringing healing to creation by themselves, collectively, with God’s wisdom and guidance, we can bring about positive restoration to the harm which we have inflicted, and “...cooperate with Him in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation.”¹²⁷

We can work toward the manifestation of the Peaceable Kingdom alluded to in Isaiah, but we need to be willing to make some personal changes and sacrifices. “If we fail to put our faith into action through such works of mercy, our faith is purely intellectual, ‘lip service,’ so to speak. Simply stated, if we accept Christ as the Son of the Living God and the Savior of the world, yet we fail to bring His love to others around us, then we are liars. Hence, faith without such good works is dead, and it is precisely on our willingness to put our faith into action that our eternal salvation hinges, as Christ reveals in Matthew 25.”¹²⁸

By making daily choices which are more compassionate to creation, our lives become a testimony of God’s love. “We must love life so that others may see and know that it belongs to God.”¹²⁹ In this way we are living the truth and potential as persons created by God. “We are called by God to reflect divinity, to become icons of Jesus Christ... By our lives we must demonstrate the Gospels and the presence of Jesus Christ.”¹³⁰

As Christians, we should be standing against injustice, and making conscious choices about how we spend our money that take into account the suffering of people and

the rest of God's creation. It is incompatible with a love of God to turn a blind eye to the suffering we are inflicting upon God's creation. "The infliction of suffering on innocent, defenseless beings, human or animal, is nothing less than intrinsically evil... to stand for Jesus is to stand for the Christ-like innocence of animals, against the intrinsic evil of cruelty."¹³¹

In the midst of the suffering that pervades this world, there is still hope for something better. God is amazing. With God, anything is possible. We can consider the effects of our actions when we make daily purchasing and lifestyle choices. There are many ways in which our everyday choices can demonstrate a more compassionate and loving relationship with other people, other species, and the environment... the gifts of creation which God has bestowed upon us. "...To stand for Jesus is to stand for God's justice and the final release of all creation from bondage to decay, against the moral hopelessness and despair that characterize our time."¹³² We can live full and healthy lives when making choices that are more compassionate to God's creation. There is no better time than now to begin living our lives as a more fully loving testimony of the eternal hope of God.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR COMPASSIONATE LIVING

"Choose to Reuse: An Encyclopedia of Services, Products, Programs & Charitable Organizations that Foster Reuse," by Nikki & David Goldbeck

"Greening Congregations Handbook: Stories, Ideas, and Resources for Cultivating Creation Awareness and Care in Your Congregation," Edited and compiled by Tanya Marcovna Barnett

“National Green Pages: A Directory of Products and Services for People and the Planet,”

by Co-Op America

<http://www.creationcare.org>

<http://www.christianveg.org>

<http://www.earthministry.org>

<http://www.healthyfamiliesnow.org>

<http://www.healthymomshealthyfamilies.org>

<http://www.sweatshopwatch.org>

<http://www.factoryfarming.com>

<http://www.vrg.org>

<http://www.veganoutreach.org>

<http://www.vegsources.com>

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²²Campolo, T. (1992). *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature*. p. 96.

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http://conservation.catholic.org/more_pope_john_paul_ii.htm.

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CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This ILP has been an incredible opportunity for me to synthesize my Christian faith with all that I have learned throughout my time in the IMED program. As an Orthodox Christian, I am also excited to have found a few other Orthodox Christians, such as Patriarch Bartholomew and Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky, who have well-articulated statements and writings about Christians as stewards of God’s creation.