



Greening the Orthodox Parish: A Handbook for Christian Ecological Practice

Frederick W Krueger

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Even though the Eastern Orthodox Church is widely recognized as having a deep and profound theological understanding of the world as God's creation, practice of this theology has been elusive. To address this dilemma this text provides guidance on the spiritual and physical steps that are necessary for Orthodox Christians to apply their theology to ecological issues. This book includes a special foreword by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who introduces the challenge of greening the Church. In his commentary, he sees that the application of this book's themes can lead to the creation of "green parishes" and even "green priests" throughout the world. Throughout the book the principles and practices underlying the transformation and transfiguration of creation are emphasized. The result is a simple yet comprehensive "hands-on" approach to a Christian caring for the earth. This is accomplished by providing an organic sequence of themes that engage the development of ecological consciousness within the Church. The book unfolds in the following manner. First, Greening the Orthodox Parish provides theological foundations for ecological action. This includes the writings of the Orthodox patriarchs as they translate theology into a call for Christian action on ecology; the Scriptural passages which lead to care for the earth; and the writings of the saints which provide historical perspective on ecology as a perennial imperative for the Church. Second, upon these foundations – the Scriptures, the saints, and the voice of the Church, a series of issues are examined through Orthodox theology and modern science. This leads to spiritual direction on how to extend the teachings of the Church into issues such as global warming, toxic chemicals, forests, consumerism, etc., so that healing direction results for parishioners, the surrounding culture, and through these, the environment. Third, a process for developing parish groups is identified so that any parish may address environmental issues. The task is not only the greening of parish action, but a greening of attitudes. For this task principles are provided including a check list for pastors to ensure that the parish is using suitable methods for energy and conservation. Guidelines are also available for parishioner attitudes so that they may develop ecological consciousness that is at once obedience to God, fidelity to the Church, and an engagement with the issues that assault the life of the parish. Fourth, a further orientation to Orthodox ecological awareness is cultivated through the inclusion of a study course that uses key writings by Orthodox hierarchs and theologians. The task of greening the parish requires study and application. This course launches a journey of learning and growing in ecological awareness that becomes an extension of the life of the parish into the life of the world. Throughout the book a special emphasis exists on the ecological witness of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Not only is this book dedicated to His All-Holiness, but it relies on his writings for a stream of quotations. These citations indicate that this greening theme is not some modern innovation creeping into Orthodox thought. Rather, it is an extension of timeless theological principles to the serious issues facing our world. Creation care is akin to new wine drawn from old wineskins; it is a continuation of the gospel message that allows an addressing of the problems facing the modern world. Jesus Christ taught us the need to do the will of God "on earth as it is in heaven." This Handbook is only a contemporary pathway for the application of the timeless Orthodox faith to the issues of the modern world.

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