

Climate Crisis and Sustainable Creaturely Care

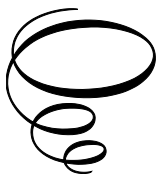
Climate Crisis and Sustainable Creaturely Care:

*Integrated Theology,
Governance and Justice*

Edited by

Christina Nellist

**Cambridge
Scholars
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To Alexander (2yrs) and Amelia (1yr)
and to the grandchildren of this world.

*And he said to them,
“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well,
will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?”
And they could not reply to him.*

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FOREWORD

It is an honor to be invited to contribute a few lines to this significant and splendid anthology of articles comprising two substantial volumes on the climate crisis and creation care. The articles collected by my dear friend, Dr. Christina Nellist, range broadly from writers of diverse religious backgrounds and convictions to writers of different scientific and scholarly interests but also to writers with specific and constructive proposals to resolve unprecedented global challenges of our time.

There is something positive and poignant about the time in which we live. It is, as His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has repeatedly reminded us, a *kairos* moment. That is to say, it is a moment of crisis and consequence. And the Greek word for crisis (*krisis*) indicates a sense of responsibility and accountability for the way in which we respond to the unique and universal problems that we have created and face. The pandemic that wreaked havoc throughout our world for more than an entire year has - beyond the many other lessons about our mistrustful relationship with science and the destructive repercussions of the inequitable gap between rich and poor - taught us that no one is safe and no one can be saved unless everyone is safe and everyone is saved.

Let me press this analogy between Covid-19 and climate change a little further. Ironically, the strategies used to dismiss climate change and Covid-19 routinely follow a similar pattern and are regularly employed by the same people. My son recently remarked that Covid-19 ultimately provided us with a fascinating social experiment: Throughout the pandemic, he observed, we were asked to do the *slightest*, most *trivial* thing for the sake of others and the world: simply wear a mask! And yet the answer was no; still the answer was politicized; even so people refused. What, he asked, are the chances that people will respond to having less and hoarding less, or wasting less and sharing more?

Just as we cannot play politics with science (or the health of its people), we cannot play politics with climate change (or the health of our planet). Nonetheless, the greatest threat to our planet - the defining issue of our time - is not the novel coronavirus, but climate change. The rapidly growing but conveniently neglected toll from rising global temperatures will eclipse the current number of deaths from all the infectious diseases combined if climate change is not constrained. In the wake of the pandemic, even the

World Economic Forum called for “a great reset” of capitalism, arguing that sustainability will only be achieved through drastic lifestyle changes.

For thirty years, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew - and following suit, Pope Francis today - has emphasized that climate change is not simply a political, scientific, or technological issue. It is essentially and fundamentally a theological, spiritual and ethical issue. Climate change can only be reversed or resolved by addressing the moral causes of the ecological crisis. This is precisely why religion has a key role to play. And it is precisely why everyone has a vital part to play.

Now in order to appreciate this spiritual or moral worldview, we must acknowledge the world as larger than ourselves and our interests; we must appreciate creation as broader than our own conviction or confession; we must adopt a spirit of humility and simplicity. The root of the problem invariably lies in the paradigms that impel us to pursue particular lifestyles. After all, climate change is not simply the result of bad judgment or greed; it is also largely a result of oblivious success and mindless development. Far too often we are convinced that solving the ecological crisis is only a matter of acting differently, more sustainably. Let us not forget though that it is our very actions that led us to this mess in the first place.

We cannot simply continue the way have been proceeding. I wonder if we have at least learned this lesson from the pandemic. Or are we simply anxious to return to “life as normal” and “business as usual” - to life as we knew it before the crisis. Instead, should we not learn from our errors? Should we not first stop to reflect? This is the way that we have been taught by the prophets and mystics through the centuries: That we should tread more lightly, more thoughtfully and more cautiously on this planet; that we should be prepared to reverse our perspectives and practices. And here, I think, lies the heart of our problem. Because we are unwilling - in fact, we violently resist any call - to adopt simpler lives.

Our lifestyles and choices - our unquenchable demand for convenient and complacent habits - are clearly contrary and contradictory to the way of the Christian Gospel, which emphasizes both the way of the cross and the value of loving one’s neighbor. Any follower of Christ that has discovered a comfortable or privileged way of reclining on the cross is deluded at best and dishonest at worst. Any person of good will that fails to perceive the impact of our attitudes and actions for the whole world, especially the poor, is uninformed at best and unresponsive at worst.

The authors of these chapters raise valid and vital concerns about the way we treat one another, the way we handle animals and the way we manage the resources of our planet throughout historical periods and cultures, across many nations and continents. They address issues of

political urgency and economic growth, the health of human beings and sustainability of rainforests, as well as the legal rights of animals and of the earth itself. In this framework, the volumes at hand present the reader with yet another important piece of the puzzle in the lethargic, albeit pressing way that we are all called to advance from perception to practice.

John Chryssavgis

INTRODUCTION

Today, it is reasonable to suggest that most people understand that climate change is real and that it is dangerous. Whilst their level of knowledge on the subject varies (and it is likely that the majority need to know more), with children to grandparents demonstrating on the streets in countries across the world, there is at last, an acknowledgment that urgent and immediate action must be taken. Societies better understand their global interconnectedness to each other, to other creatures and to our planetary boundaries. Our presence, level of consumption, and misuse of the natural world has negatively changed our atmosphere, weather patterns, oceans, environments, and the lives of the creatures within those environments. This “misuse and abuse”¹ threatens all forms of life, including our own.²

Dealing with Covid-19 has also meant dramatic changes to the way we live, resulting in our industries and economies grinding to a halt and extending the gap between rich and poor. Increasingly, we hear disparate voices repeating the same message: “we do not want more of the same”,

¹ St Gregory of Nyssa’s teaching on our gluttony and how it leads us to other forms of selfishness, is entirely pertinent for today where the richer nation’s obsession with food - evidenced for example, in the large number of media programs/focus on the subject and our wastefulness of it - is a major contributor to climate change, soil and water pollution, habitat and biodiversity loss. See ‘On Love of the Poor 1. On Good Works’, (De beneficentia). S. Holman (trans) *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, Oxford, OUP. 2001: 198.

² In 2000 when living in the Seychelles, I helped fund the establishment of the Sea-Level Rise Foundation by Dr Ralph Payet. We knew then that some Pacific islands were regularly flooded at high tide. Some of those islands are gone. For the impact on biodiversity loss through fire, see for example, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1920/Quick_Guides/AustralianBushfires.

“we want a new normal”, and “building back better” policy decisions³ and the academic world has responded with helpful analysis.⁴

These two substantial collections⁵ add to that corpus of material, as they feature chapters by specialists with expertise in different disciplines who write from different contexts, cultures, and religions. They come together to write with authority and clarity on various aspects of the climate crisis and care for the natural world. They write either from faith-based or secular perspectives but share a vision and desire to explain why we are in this critical situation, ask difficult questions of us, governments, and civic leaders and explain how we might affect real change.

Regardless of their expertise, they write in the hope that we, either as individuals or as decision makers in government and civil society, will be guided to respond to the climate crisis far more quickly than is currently the case. For without swift action, we condemn future generations of human and non-human animals, to lives of intolerable climate and social instability, with little hope of regaining what humans have squandered by our collective arrogance. More explicitly - to the certain death of billions of people and species of flora and fauna, as the ‘Hothouse-Earth’ scenario becomes a reality.

Some write with bravery on topics that are rarely discussed such as the corruption at the heart of the illegal wildlife trade; population dynamics; mass migration, and social security theories and on equally challenging subjects such as greening theological education; animals as co-workers, neighbors, food, or an extended Image of God. Others write from a scientific or legal perspective on the crisis in the Amazon; climate instability; medical unpreparedness; the failures of the animal-testing model; on the legal right

³ E.g., International Monetary Fund, 2020b: World Economic Outlook, October 2020. A Long and Difficult Ascent, Chapter 3, Mitigating Climate Change Growth and Distribution-Friendly Strategies. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/09/30/world-economicoutlook-october-2020>

⁴ This book is one example. See also, the expert analysis prepared for the Oxford Review of Economic Policy 36(S1): Hepburn, C., et al, (2020), ‘Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change?’, Smith School Working Paper 20-02; Kate Raworth’s DEAL (doughnuteconomics.org) for frameworks for practical regenerative and distributive systems at local and national levels; Vallejo L., et al, (2021) ‘Halving Global CO2 Emissions by 2050: Technologies and Costs’, *International Energy Journal* 21 (March 2021) 147-158.

⁵ The first book on the theme is entitled *Climate Crisis and Creation Care: Historical Perspectives, Ecological Integrity, and Justice*, (Cambridge Scholars, 2021).

to a healthy environment or protection for animals and environments. Others still, combine subjects such as eco-economics, justice and ethics, theology and dietary choices, sustainability and sacramental living, or the wisdom in First Nations' relationships with the natural world. The list is long, seemingly disparate yet interconnected in a way oft quoted in Orthodoxy, as a communion of love and compassion.

As a theologian, educator, and lifelong conservationist, who has lived in nine countries and several continents, I have always argued that it is incumbent upon people of faith and their clergy to engage with these subjects, both individually and institutionally (locally and nationally), just as they are engaged in providing alms; justice for the poor; the provision of schools, health clinics, feeding programs or in the prescription of diets.

Everything is connected and interdependent. The climate emergency is real, it is imminent and without local action, millions⁶, possibly billions of people and certainly billions of animals and plants will die, if our religious institutions among others, do not 'set the scene and grasp the opportunity'⁷ given to us by God to prevent such calamities.

Brief historical reflection

In the 70s and 80s many of us were teaching or producing scientific papers on various aspects of what we now refer to as 'climate change'. During this same period, some religious leaders, such as the then Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios 1st, expressed concern on the misuse and abuse of the natural environment. He called for individuals to change their hearts and minds, and to view the world not as something solely to be used as a resource, but rather, as something to nurture by enabling nature's flourishing.

In the case of the non-human animal creation, it is safe to say that historically, there has not been an entirely favorable Christian view of relationships with animals or their place in a world dominated by an anthropocentric mindset. Despite God's clear teaching in Judeo-Christian scripture defining a violence-free diet, closely followed by teachings on a violence-free community and concepts of blessing, flourishing, and

⁶ Nearly 690 million people or 9% of the world population were undernourished and about 750 million, or nearly 10% were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity in 2019. See WMO State of the Global Climate 2020-Provisional Report, available at: [doc_num.php\(wmo.int\)](http://doc_num.php(wmo.int))

⁷ Reference to my chapter in *Climate Crisis and Creation Care: Historical Perspectives, Ecological Integrity and Justice* (Cambridge Scholars, 2021).

covenant with all things in God's very good creation, we Christians have at best been blind and indifferent to, for example, the link between climate change, the animal-based diet and animal/human suffering, or at worst, have taught that animals have no value in themselves - they are 'irrationals' - nothing more than resources for the humans of this world.

We have, in the main, ignored the biodiversity of Genesis; ignored Christ's teaching in Luke 14:5 that we are to act immediately to prevent the suffering of humans and non-human animals, and ignored Matthew 10:29 where every individual creature - each tiny sparrow - is known and loved by God and through whom, we perceive the glory of God. Whilst some contemporary theologians attempt to positively reinterpret the teachings of Aristotle, Augustin, and Aquinas on animals (each of whom excluded non-human animals from moral consideration) without doubt, their negative views of non-human animals were incorporated to varying degrees, into Western and Eastern Christian thought.

Yet despite this backdrop, it was nonetheless, entirely in keeping with Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, that in 1989 His All-Holiness Demetrios 1st, established the 1st of September (the first day of the new ecclesiastical calendar), as the day dedicated to the protection of the natural environment, calling for Orthodox Christians not only to pray for the protection and preservation of God's creation but also to change their ethos from one of domineering tyrant, to one of protector and enabler of creation's flourishing.

This work on behalf of 'creation', 'the whole world', 'nature', continues under his successor, His All-Holiness, Bartholomew 1st⁸ culminating at this present time in the Halki Summit 111 (2019) entitled 'Theological Formation and Ecological Awareness: A Conversation on Education and the Environment'. This Summit essentially called for 'creation care' to be added to every Orthodox seminary and academic education program, and eventually, to all Orthodox parish education programs. It is important therefore to note the chapter entitled 'Designing a Green Curriculum of Orthodox Theology: A Modest Proposal' by Professors Tsalampouni and Antonopoulou⁹, which not only responds to the Patriarch's call but also stands as a framework for other faiths or denominations to adapt.

A voice speaking specifically on behalf of the non-human animal creation, is rarely heard in such august conferences and to be asked to do just that, was not only a great honor for me, but also an indication that the Orthodox Christian Church is again 'setting the scene and creating the

⁸ Also known as the Green Patriarch due to his lead and commitment to the subject.

⁹ See note 7.

opportunity' for its clergy (at every level) and its academics, to engage with the important subjects of non-human animal suffering and salvation for all beings in God's creation.

It is true, that in the 80s and 90s, progress also began to be made in the political sphere, with the 1992 Climate Convention in Rio and similar Conventions and 'commitments of intent', which continue until today.¹⁰ Yet, despite the grand words and commitments given at such important gatherings, to quote Sherrard (1998), we continue to stumble to the edge of the cliff, as if we are in some kind of collective psychosis. The obvious question to ask here is why? The answer, sadly, is because these very same governments and agencies have failed/refused to implement the necessary strategies and mechanisms to effect real change, *in the time-frame that is required to achieve said objectives*.¹¹ This suggests that they are more concerned with short-term thinking that prioritizes re-election and short-term biased fiscal systems that favor the few, rather than in reorientating our economies in order to save the lives of their citizens, and more than that, the lives, indeed existence, of the myriad of other species on this planet.

As a theologian, I argue that this is one of the reasons why those with a faith-based worldview are important to the glocal and global debates on living sustainably in an increasingly unstable world. They can provide an alternative voice and vision for the future, based in some cases upon teachings from sacred texts, which inform us that the entire world is interconnected, delicately balanced, and sacred. They can address the human sin in the structural complexities of our world by confirming Orthodox tradition, which teaches that any exploitation and cruelty towards non-human animals and the wider creation is not only spiritually, morally, and ethically wrong, but also an insult to God and a sin. Hand-in-hand with those sins are the negative soteriological implications for the individuals who harm the created world and for those who are indifferent to that harm.¹²

¹⁰ E.g., European Green Deal: A European Green Deal | European Commission (europa.eu); The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC

¹¹ See for example, 2019 IPCC Special Report Climate Change and Land: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>; 2018 IPCC Special Report Global Warming of 1.5°C, Chapter 2: Mitigation Pathways Compatible with 1.5°C in the Context of Sustainable Development; WWF Living Planet Report 2020: https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/LPR20_Full_report.pdf

¹² E.g., St Cyril of Jerusalem (*First Mystagogical Catechesis on the Mysteries: To The Enlightened*, No. 6, p. 283), identifies hunting and horseracing as examples of "the pomp of the devil", whilst the Council of Trullo Canon LI, (The Canons of the Council in Trullo, A.D. 692, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* CANNPNF2-14) denounces hunts and forbids priests and laity from even attending such "wickedness" (Byzantine canonist Balsamon's notes on the Ancient Epitome of Canon LI).

They can provide a practical holistic approach, which includes spiritual and ethical guidance on the link between climate change, a flourishing creation and socially responsible goals for a more balanced and just world. They can show that their monastic/ascetic traditions are good exemplars of a different ethos and model that can stand against the vested interests and fallacy of economic systems based upon continued growth in GDP and over-consumption, that have led us to this dangerous place. One that replaces the existing damaging model with an integrated, regenerative, and distributive system that focuses on the intrinsic value and well-being of all created beings working in harmony and balance, and importantly, one that works for all and at ground level. We are, as is often quoted in Orthodoxy, to be 'Priests of Creation', recognizing our relational ontology, rather than as destructive brutes increasingly separated from our materiality, who exploit that very material in our selfish, over-consuming and land-grabbing choices.

Recently the world's attention has been diverted to the Covid-19 pandemic. This tragedy was completely avoidable. It has thrown into high relief our treatment and misuse of non-human animals and at last, many are beginning to understand what animal advocates have always understood - the interconnectedness and interdependence of human flourishing with the flourishing of other creatures. Increasingly, there are calls for a more enlightened relationship between humans and non-human animals, for more and more people have realized that without the end of wet-markets and intensive animal-farming systems, other pandemics will undoubtedly arise and the costs - economically, physically, and mentally - far outweigh any vested interest objections and desires to return to pre-covid intensive and abusive systems.

This pandemic has led to a reawakening to the important things in life - our families, our green spaces, and the creatures in them, clean air, and functioning health-systems. Most surprising of all, is that 'lockdowns' have been achieved with a level of civic compliance never thought possible outside of oppressive regimes. This indicates that the prospect of achieving the 'new normal' has never been more attainable. What is required now is for politicians and policy makers to ride the wave of desire for real change in our economies and societies, rather than lazily returning to the destructive policies and economic strategies of the past. It is hoped that some of them will read the chapters in these volumes, in order to gain the wisdom, they so obviously lack.

It is, however, equally important for us as individuals to realize that to achieve these changes, we must play our part by changing our desires and demands. Cheap flights, cheap meat, and cheap clothes are not cheap, if the full social, environmental, and economic cost of production, transportation,

and GHG emissions are considered. Cheap is a delusion fed to us by those with other agendas - with vested interests they do not wish to relinquish. The real costs: unstable weather patterns, food insecurity, polluted air, increased water scarcity, habitat loss, species extinctions, ocean acidification, rising sea-levels¹³, the beginning of mass migration, and increasing social unrest, are now only too apparent and will become increasingly so.

Some changes are relatively easy for the individual: buying green energy; flying less often or at all; driving more slowly, cycling or walking whenever possible; buying local, wasting less, giving up or reducing animal-food products and where possible, buying from local and organic farms with high animal-welfare standards; growing our own food; planting more trees; turning off the lights; avoiding fast fashion; digging up lawns and sowing meadows; avoiding plastic; reducing, recycling, reusing; lobbying our local and national governments; talking to our clerics and co-parishioners and for those who can, having less children. The list is long enough to cater for varying degrees of commitment to change, but rapid change there must be, if we and those that share our planet, are to survive.

The same is true for Faith institutions - they can, nay must, do more. Normally we avoid words like 'must', but the terms 'should' or 'ought' although more polite, do not adequately represent the urgency of our present situation. Despite the reality that some faith groups have been resistant to modernity, faith-based institutions are increasingly recognized as being integral to the healthy functioning of modern societies in their relationship with the natural world. The chapter from the Animal Interfaith Alliance¹⁴ is therefore also worth noting, for it draws upon the collective wisdom of 10 major faith groups, many of whom have no need to 'educate' their members on compassionate care for animals or nature, because creation care is a core tenet of their belief systems.

In recent decades, whilst increasing numbers of theologians working in the fields of systematic and moral theology have shown that this is also true for Christianity, (e.g., Prof. Andrew Linzey) what is beyond doubt, is a disturbing gap between Christian theory and practice on this important subject. As an Eastern Orthodox Christian, I can show through the teachings of early church Fathers and the work of its recent Patriarchs, and certainly the incumbent Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew 1st, and here I include the Catholic Pope Francis, that the Christian Church can promote the best ecological practices, despite the fact, that many of its clergy of various

¹³ WMO State of the Global Climate 2020.

¹⁴ I declare an interest here. Our charity, Pan Orthodox Concern for Animals is a member, I am a Board member and my husband, retired Archpriest of Tanzania and the Seychelles, is one of its Patrons.

levels are, tragically for them and their parishioners, still deeply unresponsive to their Patriarch/Pope's teachings on the subject of creaturely and environmental care, and the greening of their parishes.

As one of the pillars of civil society, it is important that Faith groups understand the science relating to planetary boundaries and how each parish or faith community, not just a few, must act now to 'green' their communities in order to protect their parishioners, their families, and the world in which they live.¹⁵ They must make time to teach that sacrifice for others, including the natural environment, is our duty as Image of an all-loving God. They can do so by instructing their financial departments to divest from industries and companies that harm the natural world and invest in those with high 'green', 'sustainable', and ethically just policies. Faith groups must familiarize themselves and not ignore, the serious climate impact of the animal-based diet and its delivery systems.¹⁶ In so doing, it will be easier for them to guide their clergy and members to reduce their animal-food intake; wherever possible, to provide vegan and vegetarian meals at gatherings - having an animal-based meal as a dietary option and, where possible, to purchase any animal-food from organic farms with high-welfare standards. Each local church, temple or mosque can buy and urge their faithful to buy, toiletries, cleaning products, and cosmetics that are environmentally friendly, and not tested on animals. They can increase or initiate forms of animal-blessing services in their churches, mosques, and temples or outer-courtyards where everyone can witness that all things are loved by God¹⁷ and, in relation to wild animals, they can also declare that all forms of 'sport', 'trophy' or 'recreational' hunting is a sin and an insult to God.¹⁸ Perhaps a few words from the recent Holy and Great Council of

¹⁵ See Prof Miller's chapter in this volume.

¹⁶ See D'Silva's chapter in this volume; the aforementioned 2019 IPCC Climate Change and Land report, which states that the largest potential for reducing AFOLU emissions are through reduced deforestation and forest degradation (0.4–5.8 GtCO₂-eq yr⁻¹), a shift towards plant-based diets (0.7–8.0 GtCO₂-eq yr⁻¹) and reduced food and agricultural waste (0.8–4.5 GtCO₂-eq yr⁻¹).

¹⁷ See Pan Orthodox Concern for Animals Charity's 'When Faith Meets Fur' page and 'How To' tips on our Videos page and the Greek Orthodox Church of America's excellent project on 'Greening the Parish' at: greenparish.goarch.org. See the first in the series by Fr John Chryssavgis, theological advisor to His All-Holiness Bartholomew, available at: <https://youtu.be/mG4fMMon2mw>.

¹⁸ See earlier ref to St Cyril of Jerusalem. In many cases, where the rich from the West travel to Africa to kill animals, it can and is, increasingly described as a modern form of colonial exploitation. Also RSPB 'State of Nature' report 2019, which found that over the last 50 years, 40 million birds have vanished from the UK's skies and

the Orthodox Church¹⁹ would be useful in drawing this introduction to a close:

The ecological crisis, which is connected to climate change and global warming, makes it incumbent upon the Church to do everything within her spiritual power to protect God's creation from the consequences of human greed. As the gratification of material needs, greed leads to spiritual impoverishment of the human being and to environmental destruction. We should not forget that the earth's natural resources are not our property, but the Creator's: *The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world, and those who dwell therein* (Ps 23:1). Therefore, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the protection of God's creation through the cultivation of human responsibility for our God-given environment and the promotion of the virtues of frugality and self-restraint.

That books such as these are still necessary in 2021 is a tragic testament not only to our individual failures but also to the failure of successive governments and institutions across the world to a) acknowledge and act on the science and b) acknowledge the wisdom in the thousands of voices from across the world, who for decades have spoken with knowledge and sincerity on these subjects. This in part, is due to those who through ignorance or powerful vested interests, deny the climate problem or deliberately mislead people about the severity of the climate danger and, in some cases, threaten to withhold funding to a range of institutions, including the church. In equal measure, we can also add our long-term blindness and indifference to the need of others and nature, whilst promoting our own desires, and at times, destructive cultural 'traditions', such as hunting.

Finally, those still quoting 2050 in their decarbonization or 'building back better' strategies, continue to be deaf to the reality unfolding before us. As such, *Climate Crisis and Sustainable Creaturely Care: Integrated Theology, Governance and Justice*, is essential reading for those involved in national/local governments and religious institutions and for academics and students in a variety of disciplines.

that around two-fifths of UK species are in decline. See Birdlife International for the huge numbers of birds shot for 'recreation'.

¹⁹ The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World - Official Documents - The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (holycouncil.org)

PART ONE:

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES,
GOVERNANCE AND CREATION CARE**

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANIMAL INTERFAITH ALLIANCE'S VISION FOR THE PLACE OF ANIMALS IN A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

INTRODUCED BY DR RICHARD D. RYDER
AND CONCLUSION BY BARBARA GARDNER

Introduction - *Dr Richard D. Ryder, AIA President*

The Animal Interfaith Alliance (AIA) was founded in 2014 by its current Chief Executive Barbara Gardner. Its mission is to create a united voice for animals from all the major faiths, in order to bring about a world where animals are treated with respect and compassion. AIA draws upon the combined wisdom of all faiths and promotes social harmony by bringing faith groups together.

I feel it is an honour for me therefore to have been made the President of AIA, drawing together as it does no less than 17 faith organisations which agree upon the desirability for a better friendship between human beings and their evolutionary cousins - the other sentient animal species.

All religions have at least three functions: to provide an explanation of the Universe, a way to change things for the better, and a code of morality. It is the latter that especially concerns us here.

Why are such things as friendship, care, compassion, equality, liberty, and justice so important? It is surely because they all tend to reduce suffering and promote happiness, not just for human beings but for *all* animals. All animals are citizens of their land and governments should have a duty to care for them, just as they do for humans. What is morally good consists in reducing pains and increasing happiness. In my scheme the word 'Pain' covers everything from physical pains to mental pains such as fear, boredom, and despair.

I believe that morality is about helping *others* to reduce their pains. Helping ourselves is not morality but merely psychology. We naturally and selfishly look after ourselves, finding for ourselves food, drink, and other

sources of contentment. But morality is a more noble thing - it is when we apparently step outside our natures to care for others - and that word 'others' should apply to all those who can suffer pain. Science now confirms the obvious: thousands of species in addition to the human species can and do suffer pain, just as human animals do. Prejudice against nonhuman species is irrational - and such speciesism is no more acceptable than racism or sexism. It is a prejudice based upon morally irrelevant physical differences. The great similitude we share with the other animals is our capacity to suffer. X amount of pain in an elephant or a mouse matters equally with X amount of pain felt by an alien from another planet or a human being.

Compassion is actually part of our nature. We naturally can feel empathy for the sufferings of others, so we need to encourage our own compassionate faculties. Each suffering individual matters - a hundred sufferers are no more important than one, so adding up pains and pleasures across individuals is meaningless. Our experiences are contained by the boundaries of our consciousness.

The remarkable unity of the great religions in our respect and compassion for animals draws us all together in the Golden Rule: do only to others what you would like others to do to you.

Jain and Hindu Perspectives - *Nitin Mehta MBE*

Two of the oldest religions of the world, Hinduism and Jainism, have advocated a lifestyle which is in harmony with nature. The resources that nature has provided in the form of forests, rivers and oceans, as well as the sun and the moon, are worthy of worship to Hindus and Jains. The idea is not to exploit the world's resources but to respect and revere them. It is not unusual to see people in India offering prayers to the rivers, mountains, the sun and moon, or bowing down to an elephant. The idea that animals are sentient beings and have souls, has been around for tens of thousands of years. The struggle that other cultures and faiths have with this idea is a source of mystery to faiths born in India, namely Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism.

Compassion towards animals is a core belief of Hindus and Jains. Indeed, there is no spiritual progress without compassion towards all living beings. It is bad karma to harm animals - even insects. It is in the nature of a mosquito to bite you but it is bad karma to harm it. You may protect yourself from being bitten by taking preventive measures but you should not harm it. Just as every action has a reaction, good and bad karma will impact an individual's actions.

Closely linked with the law of karma is the belief in reincarnation. Our next birth depends on our actions in this birth.

The Hindu Perspective

The *Bhumi (Earth) Project* has put together a Hindu declaration on climate change. It quotes several ancient Hindu scriptures.

The Mahabharata (109.10): “Dharma exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all beings is sustained, that for sure is Dharma.”

The Srimad Bhagvatam (11/2/41): “Ether, air, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers and seas, they are all organs of God’s body. Remembering this a devotee respects all species.”

The Jain Perspective

The Jain *Declaration on Nature* was presented to Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace on 23rd October 1990. There are 24 Tirthankars, enlightened souls, in Jainism. The 24th Tirthankar, Lord Mahaveer was present around 2,600 years ago. He preached a complete and absolute compassion to all living beings. Jains are well known for running animal-sanctuaries in India. There are five main concepts Jains live by: non-violence (Ahimsa); truth (Satya); non-stealing (Asetya); chastity (Brahmacharya); and non-possessiveness or non-materialism (Aparigraha).

Jains also have a concept called, 'Abhay Daan' which means giving someone protection from fear of death. So not only do you have to avoid any violence, you have to be proactive in your non-violence (ahimsa). This means you should actively campaign against all forms of exploitation, especially of animals, as they cannot fight for themselves. Many Hindus and Jains stop animals being taken for illegal slaughter.

Jains also believe in the idea of ‘Parasparapagraho Jivanam’, meaning that we are interdependent on other living beings, as well as all that nature provided in the form of rivers, oceans, forests, and mountains. For tens of thousands of years practicing Hindus and Jains have been vegetarian and more recently vegan. To solve the existential crisis that we are facing today a move away from a meat-based diet to a plant-based diet is extremely urgent.

Buddhist Perspective - *Dr Will Tuttle*

Buddhism is a nontheistic religion with well-known foundational teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, that support the central teaching, which is to liberate the mind from ignorance so that it awakens to the truth of being. Buddha means “awakened one” and the Buddhist Dharma, or teaching, emphasises cultivating mindful awareness through meditation practice that is supported by ethical living.

In Buddhist ethics, both human and nonhuman animals are equally considered worthy of ethical treatment. The underlying principle of ahimsa, which is non-harmfulness to others by any action of body, speech, or mind, applies to all sentient beings equally. The Buddhist teachings are unequivocal on this point; Buddhist practitioners are called to practice mindful compassion in all their relations with other living beings who are capable of suffering.

For this reason, the practice of vegetarianism and veganism is widespread among Buddhists in many Asian countries. Buddhist monasteries have been centres of vegan living for many centuries in China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan, for example, due to the Buddhist ethical prohibition of eating animal-flesh and eggs, and the absence of any pre-existing dairy tradition. The Buddhist teachings also emphasise minimalism as well, and discourage waste and overuse of resources out of respect for animals, nature, and others.

Buddhism teaches that our true nature is eternal consciousness, which makes our physical body possible. We erroneously identify with this body and its conditioned thoughts and feelings, and it is this delusion that keeps us filled with craving and aversion, causing us to be reborn in endless lifetimes. This endless round of suffering is known as Samsara. Depending on the depth of our ignorance, we may be reborn in a variety of realms, such as the human realm or the animal realm, or in lower hell realms of acute suffering, or higher heaven realms of relative comfort. All are temporary, and the only ultimate liberation is through Prajna, the wisdom that arises through Sila, ethical living, and Samadhi, meditative equanimity and insight.

Thus, Buddhism is a religion that emphasises, above all else, the importance of ethical living - practicing respect for all expressions of life - coupled with meditative discipline that tames and trains the mind to free itself from conditioned thinking. These two practices, Sila and Samadhi, reinforce each other. The more our actions of body, speech, and mind are ethical and filled with loving kindness for others, the more we remove inner hindrances and clear a path to be able to abide in the open, sky-like awareness of pure, joy-

filled consciousness that is no longer bound by clinging to the false sense of a fundamentally separate self. The more this meditative insight authentically establishes itself in our awareness, the more we naturally act in ways that are ethical, because we directly understand and experience the deeper truth that we are not essentially separate from others. It becomes obvious that in harming others, we harm ourselves, and in helping them, we help ourselves and all living beings.

Thus, the basic Buddhist Dharma calls us to question cultural narratives that promote violence to animals and ecosystems, and to dedicate ourselves to lives of kindness and respect for others. All expressions of life are seen as infinitely interconnected, and the more we awaken from culturally-imposed delusion, such as oppressing and exploiting animals, the more we are awakening our innate Buddha-nature, and authentically contributing to the health, happiness, and freedom of the world community that includes all living beings.

Jewish Perspective - Prof. Dan Cohn-Sherbok

According to the Book of Genesis, there is a fundamental connection between human beings and animals. According to Scripture, animals were created on the fifth day of creation. Adam and Eve were created on the next day. One of Adam's first responsibilities was to name all the animals. Later Noah rescued enough animals to sustain all of the species. The Bible relates that God permitted human beings to eat animals, but at the same time animals are to be protected against undue cruel slaughter by banning the practice of cutting a limb off a living creature (Genesis 9:3-5). Judaism thus seeks a balance between the permission to use animals for human needs and the prohibition against unnecessary cruelty.

Both biblical and rabbinic law extend the prohibition against taking a limb from a living animal to mandate that animals meant for consumption must be slaughtered as humanely as possible. *Kashrut* (laws concerning keeping kosher) demands that an animal must be slaughtered through a process known as '*shechita*' meaning that the animal is killed by a single stroke of the knife. According to tradition, *shechita* is viewed as causing less suffering than other modes of slaughter. In this regard, the twelfth century philosopher Moses Maimonides argued in *The Guide for the Perplexed* that the Torah commands that an animal should not be tormented by cutting its throat in a clumsy manner, by piercing it, or by cutting off a limb while it is still alive.

Jews are thus permitted to eat meat, but they are obliged to take certain precautions to ensure that animals do not suffer unnecessarily. This concept

is referred to as *tzaar baalei chayim* (not causing animal suffering). This embraces the various laws of *kashrut* as well as a wide range of restrictions regarding animals such as working an animal day and night without a break. In addition, it imposes various obligations on those responsible for caring for animals such as feeding, watering, and caring for their basic needs. It is even permitted to violate Sabbath law to care for a wounded animal.

Alongside these regulations, there is a parallel tradition of Jewish vegetarianism. In the past such scholars as Joseph Albo, a fifteenth century Spanish philosopher and Isaac Arama, a fifteenth century Spanish rabbi, regarded vegetarianism as a moral ideal. While most Jews today are not vegetarians, a number of notable rabbis and scholars have advocated vegetarianism. Most significantly, Abraham Isaac Kook, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, believed that permission to eat meat was only a temporary concession. In his view, God who is merciful would not have instituted an everlasting law permitting the killing of animals for food.

In recent years, a number of Jewish groups have promoted vegetarianism such as The Jewish Vegetarians of North America, Shamayim: Jewish Animal Advocacy, The Jewish Vegetarian Society and Vegan Friendly. Jewish vegetarianism and veganism have become especially popular among Israeli Jews. In 2016 Israel was described as the most vegan country on earth as five per cent of its population avoided animal produce.

Eastern Orthodox Perspective - *Dr Christina Nellist*

Eastern Orthodox Christianity teaches that reverence for animals and sensitivity to their suffering is part of our faith and that love for God, humans, and animals cannot be sharply separated. Cruelty to animals and the environment, and/or indifference to their suffering are grave sins requiring genuine repentance. Such teachings echo those from the earliest periods of the Christian Church. For example, St Irenaeus of Lyon and St Cyril of Jerusalem teach that “all things” in “the whole world” are to be embraced as they too were made by God; that “the whole world was ransomed, for it was no mere man, but the only-begotten Son of God, who died on its behalf”. St Basil of Seleucia taught that Christ saved the world and liberated the earth and recounts all the benefits of salvation including “a principle of purification for the world”, and a “renewing of nature”. Such teachings remind us that animals are important to God and are saved at the eschaton.

Christian sacred texts confirm the innate harmony, unity, and violence-free peaceableness of the original Edenic life, which will be restored in the second Kingdom. Crucially, Christ calls for action to prevent human and

animal suffering in His teachings on the Sabbath, (Luke 14:5) indicating that He expects that same concern, action, and compassionate treatment for His non-human beings throughout the week.¹ Certainly, biblical, patristic, and contemporary commentary is pregnant with material to formulate a universal, compassionate, and merciful theology, which specifically helps us to view non-human animals as individual creatures who are loved, and saved by Christ, rather than as disposable lives and resources.

Tradition also teaches that we as Image must strive to achieve the ‘Image and Likeness’ of an all-loving God. This Archetype is the source of all good, love, compassion, and mercy, who loves righteousness, hates iniquity, and desires mercy not sacrifice. God is neither cruel, abusive, exploitative, nor evil. Through a process of perpetual striving (επέκτασις) to attain God’s Likeness, and our original violence-free nature, we are increasingly able to live virtuously and lovingly, in a godly, compassionate way. This possibility is evidenced in the pre-lapsarian state found in the lives of many saints and stands in stark contrast to the multitude of sinful, cruel, abusive, and exploitative actions perpetrated upon animals by many individuals and industries in our contemporary world. Despite our rich theology on creation care, there is still a marked gap between theory and practice in many parishes, which must be addressed through the education of our priests and parishioners, if “all things” are to achieve a truly just and sustainable future.

Catholic Perspective - *Dr Deborah Jones*

The Catholic Church looks both to the past and the future. There has been little official teaching about animals until recently, and so previous attitudes have been mixed, from largely ignoring their interests, to strongly advocating care and compassion, as in the case of many of the Saints, especially St Francis of Assisi. He promoted an understanding of the animal world as a sign of God’s creative goodness and of all life, human and animal, as possessing a common origin. We and all other beings are equally created and so are as brothers and sisters. Many saints considered that living in peace with wild animals reflected an anticipation of the Peaceable Kingdom, when the world as God intended will be restored and violence be no more.

The current major teaching document, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, declares that all people must “respect the particular goodness of every creature, [and] avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for

¹ In Greek texts, ‘son and ox’.