

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE



Lesson Plan on the Environment

Student Handout:

THE ENVIRONMENT

BRINGING RELIGION AND SCIENCE TOGETHER

September 1 was declared the Day for the Protection of the Environment by Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios. He called on Orthodox Christians to thank God for the gift of Creation and to pray for its preservation. Following in his footsteps, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew cares about the entire world—everyone and the earth itself. He teaches that all people must care for the environment.

To harm the environment is a sin.

All people must repent for the damage they have caused to the planet.

Even the poorest and weakest persons can take steps to heal the planet.

He once said, "In former centuries the Church prayed for the protection of all people against natural disasters. We now face the need to pray for the protection of nature against human destruction." Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's care for the environment has led him to be called the "Green Patriarch." For his environmental work, he was named one of the world's "100 Most Influential People" by *Time* magazine in 2008.

In 1995, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew created the Religion, Science, and the Environment (RSE) group, which brought together religious leaders of all faiths, scientists, and political leaders. The group used two ways of looking at the world—from our religious beliefs and our scientific knowledge—to understand the environmental problems of several major rivers and seas and to consider solutions. RSE focused on water because of its importance for the world's health and its spiritual significance.

Christ calls Himself "the living water."

Every human being is made up of 70% water.

Our planet itself also is made up of 70% water.

Photos top to bottom:

In Greece, 2008.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's home island, Imvros.

At the RSE symposium on the Arctic, 2007.

ANYTIME LESSON

THE GREEN PATRIARCH

DVD & Student Handout (page 1)

MATERIALS

- Several children's creation storybooks or coloring pages
- "The Green Patriarch" DVD
- Zines and Bibles
- Appropriate article(s) for your students from the "Green Christianity" issue of *PRAXIS* (Fall 2009), available at <http://issuu.com/orthodoxmarketplace/docs/issuepdf--22->

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Discuss** the Orthodox Christian view on the environment.
- **Describe** the work of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Green Patriarch.
- **Develop** a mature understanding of the role of a Christian in God's creation.

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
The earth is full of Your possessions—
This great and wide sea,
In which are innumerable teeming things,
Living things both small and great.
There the ships sail about;
There is that Leviathan
Which You have made to play there.
These all wait for You,
That You may give them their food in due season.
What You give them they gather in;
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
You hide Your face, they are troubled;
You take away their breath,
they die and return to their dust.

You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.
May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
May the Lord rejoice in His works.
He looks on the earth, and it trembles;
He touches the hills, and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have
my being.
May my meditation be sweet to Him;
I will be glad in the Lord.
May sinners be consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul!
Praise the Lord!

— *Psalms 103:24–35 (104:24–35), NKJV*

Check in on students' knowledge and attitudes before showing the movie.

Tell students that this is a brief discussion about God as Creator. This class session will focus on the Ecumenical Patriarch's mission. Discussion about the specifics of evolution, Creationism, and the compatibility of faith and science should be saved for another time, or simply later in the lesson.

Pass around several children's creation storybooks, coloring sheets, etc.

- This is how we learned about God's creation of the world as children.
- Has your understanding of creation and the environment changed as you've learned more about the Orthodox Christian Faith, and about science?
- Look out the window at the world around us. Do you believe that God is truly the Lord and Creator of everything you see?

Watch "The Green Patriarch" DVD (42 minutes), and then discuss key points. Provide updated information as needed.

- Which environmental issues from the video seem most important in your area? Which do you think are most critical for the entire planet?

Topics include toxic waste, extinction of animal species, deforestation, and climate change.

- How does the Patriarch hope to combat these problems, and what steps has he taken so far?

He has brought together leaders from many religions to call them to work toward healing the damage people have caused.

He brings together people who rarely have the opportunity to consult one another and share ideas, such as scientists and religious leaders.

- When we first started learning about the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, did you think that a single religious leader of a small group in a foreign country would be able to make a difference? Why or why not?
- How can we take better steps in our everyday

lives to help take care of God's creation?

- The Patriarch wants us to combine the perspectives of science and religion. Do you think that this is possible? How?

Read and discuss "The Environment" on page 12.

- The Patriarch works to maintain unity within the Orthodox world. He engages in dialogues with others in the hope of Christian reconciliation. And he strives to unite all people in the common cause of protecting the environment.
- Briefly remind students about the history of the Patriarchate and its relationship with the Turkish government (see pages 18–23 in zine). Even though the Phanar is just a tiny district of Istanbul, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has a global focus and impact.
- "Raising awareness" and gathering leaders and experts does produce results. For example, the Black Sea RSE grabbed the attention of the World Bank. Instead of giving a loan like it usually would, it donated \$2 million the Black Sea Environmental Program. That program, in turn, was a launching pad for other action programs.

Have students read the Creation story in **Genesis 1:1–2:3**, and then look back to the section of Psalm 103 (104) that was used as the opening prayer.

- These passages show us how God created all of creation to live together in harmony, and that He is the Lord of all.
- Is it even possible for people to re-establish that harmony?
- Do you live in harmony with the rest of creation?

The Patriarch tells us that every person can participate in helping our environment. Discuss each of the statements in the first green box on page 12:

- In what ways do you sin against God's world?
- Have you ever felt the need to repent for your actions or inaction?
- Does the last statement seem fair?





THE ENVIRONMENT

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Discuss ways to live the teachings of the Church.

Note: Read the Patriarch's speech at Georgetown, patriarchate.org/documents/georgetown_2009, for ideas to help you shape the discussion.

Lead students toward the idea that they can both take immediate action and establish a life-long commitment to living in harmony with creation (and sharing that vision).

- "Caring for God's creation" seems like an overwhelming task—does God literally expect us to save the world?
- On the other hand, the idea "caring for God's creation" can seem simplistic or mundane—what's so special about recycling and saving energy?
- One way to connect the big picture and the day-to-day is to think of "Christian environmentalism" in terms of self-control and fasting:
 - Can you control your greedy use of resources?
 - Can you live simply, just like we eat simply during a fast?
 - How can you encourage others to do the same?

Show students how other Orthodox Christians are finding ways to live in harmony with creation. Hand out one or more articles from the "Green Christianity" issue of *PRAXIS* magazine, for either reading at home or during class time.

- "Environmentalism as Mystical Stewardship," by Heather Zydek
- "The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration," a conversation with Fr. Christopher Bender
- "The Road to Green: Steps in the Right Direction," with ideas from parishes around the country
- "Tomorrow Is Here: Making a Difference Today while Building for the Future," by Christ Kamages

Additional quotes from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for further discussion:

"We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation, we are only stewards of a common heritage."

"It is not too late. God's world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future. Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing."

"As Orthodox Christians, we use the Greek 'kairos' to describe a moment in time which has eternal significance. For the human race as a whole, there is now a 'kairos,' a decisive time, in our relationship with God's Creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst consequences of human folly or we will fail to act. May God grant us the wisdom to act in time."

CLOSING PRAYER

O Loving One, safeguard the earth unharmed and all its encompassing elements, in which, by Your will, we dwell, live, move and exist, that we, Your unworthy supplicants, may be delivered from ruin and destruction.

– *Vespers for the Protection of the Environment*



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