

the Roots of the Ecological Crisis:
an Orthodox Christian Perspective

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What is the Ecological Crisis?

Global Warming & Climate Change

Mass Extinction & Loss of Bio-Diversity

Pollution of Air, Water & Land

Deforestation & Desertification

Ocean Acidification & Water Depletion

Exploitation of Animals & Humans

ECOLOGICAL SIN:

“For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the Earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands, ... for humans to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air and its life with poisonous substances - these are sins.”

- HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (1997)

“Ecological Crisis” constitutes an expression of
a “General Moral Crisis”

-Patriarch Bartholomew (2000)

“The **root cause** of our **environmental sin** lies
in our **self-centeredness** and in the **mistaken
order of values**, which we inherit and accept
without any critical evaluation.”

- Patriarch Bartholomew (2009)

Mistaken Values

- Anthropocentrism: Humanity is “Self-Centered” as a Species
Nature as *Only* Instrumentally Valuable in social systems
Nature must be Subjugated & Controlled to Extract Value
- Atomism: Separation from Each Other & Nature
- “Tech will Save us from Ecological Crisis”: Misplaced Faith in Technological Innovations Can *Only* Improve Human Life /
- “Prosperity as Abundance”: Myth that More is always Better

Ecological SIN ?

SIN: ἁμαρτία (amartia) = “To Miss the Mark”

SIN = Failure to attain Goal of being Good

SIN = Failure to attain closeness with God

SIN = Failure to Live with correct purpose

*Humanity has Collectively Failed to Live as a
Steward of Earth*

Scripture & Creation Care

Nature as Καλόν (*kalon*) = “Good” / “Beautiful”

- Genesis 1:1 -1:31: God Creates Natural World & Natural entities (plants, animals, earth)
= first things described as “Good” & “Beautiful”
- 1 Timothy 4:4 (St. Paul): “everything created by God is καλόν [Good / Beautiful]”

STEWARDSHIP NOT DOMINATION:

Humans have “Dominion” over the Earth (Gen. 1:28) yet must “Cultivate & Keep” it (Gen. 2:15)

“Dominion” as “Responsibility For”

Human’s Task = To Partake in God’s Creative Work of Renewal of Life, To Be Responsible for the Well-Being of Nature, to Cultivate Life

Creation as Sanctified

John Chrysostom (347-407): Earth as Mother & Nurse

“To question the Goodness of Creation is to Act with “Arrogant Folly”

Maximus Confessor (580-662): Panentheistic view of Omnipresence

“The Holy Spirit is not absent from any created being...permeating all things with His power, and vivifying their inner essences in accordance with their nature”

Gregory Palamas (1296-1359): Divine Energies permeate all of Creation

“All beings are effects of the creative energy...The divine energy and grace of the Spirit, being everywhere present and remaining inseparable from the Spirit”

Creation as Sanctified

“Protection of Nature” as “Veneration of God”
-Patriarch Bartholomew (1999)

ALL NATURAL BIOTIC LIFE is SANCTIFIED
& hence, worthy of being *Respected and Protected*

Sanctification of Created Life bestows upon each Life a
“Uniqueness” that makes it **“Irreplaceable”**
- John Zizioulas (2006)

Ecological Vices

Arrogance: Anthropocentrism: Humanity-Centered Worldview that has led to the Disdain & Exploitation of Nature + a Disregard for Future Generations of Humans

Avarice: Greedily Desiring Excessive levels of Wealth & Power has led to Environmentally Destructive Business Practices that also Harm the Health & Wellbeing of Human Communities

Gluttony: Excessive Consumption of: Food, Natural Resources & Material Goods

Over-Production & Over-Consumption due to our misunderstanding of “prosperity”

Apathy: Indifference toward the Social & Ecological Injustices occurring daily + Negligence to act Responsibly & ensure the good for people, animals & the planet

Neo-Classical Economic principles as Inherently Vicious:

(1) Non-Satiety of Consumer Desire

- ◆ **Collective Gluttony**: *Societal Consumption habits go well beyond Satiety to levels of Resource Depletion & Energy Waste*

(2) Unlimited Aggregate Growth of Commodity Production

(to meet the 'Demand' of Perpetually Un-satiated Desires)

- ◆ **Collective Greed**: *Insatiable Appetite for Material Excess}*

Commodification of Life as Denial of Sanctity

**Unique and Irreplaceable = Antithesis of Commodity:
Commodity is inherently fungible, or interchangeable**

Commodity = a product, an objectified entity resulting from human labor, the value of which is determined by factors external to itself, such as demand for its use and efforts of labor exerted involved in its production or cultivation

**Biotic Life and Ecosystems Cannot Simultaneously be
Commodified, (Valued Instrumentally) and Simultaneously
Sincerely Respected as Sanctified (Intrinsically Valuable)**

“**Metanoia**” (*Repentance*) entails a “Fervent Change of Mind” & a “Radical Transformation of Lifestyle” & is required to overcome our “**Environmental Sin**”

-Patriarch Bartholomew (2009)

Self-Transfiguration of our dispositions through *Askesis* on the Personal level must be accompanied by a **Societal Transformation** through Changes on the Social level

Orthodoxy (Correct Beliefs) => Orthopraxis (Right Practice):
Correct Lifestyle & Right Livelihood

Goal of Economics = Human Flourishing

- Purpose of Economy should be to serve the Well-Being of the Oikos (Humanity's Earthly Home)

Perpetual Growth is actually At Odds with the Human Flourishing:

Perpetual Growth is Unsustainable:

Constant Need for New Raw Material Inputs = Excessively & Imprudently using up natural resources

Destruction of the Ecosystems & Harm to communities dwelling in them

Numerous Empirical Studies (Economics & Psychology) demonstrate that Human-Well Being & Self-Reported Happiness Do Not Increase with Increased GDP after a Sufficiency (of Basic Needs) Threshold

Eucharistic Ethos

Attitude of Gratitude:

- Eucharistos (εὐχαρίστος) = “Thanks-Giving”= “Eucharistic”
- Do Not take the Natural Environment & Resources for Granted & Be Grateful for Nature & Recognize our Dependence on Natural World

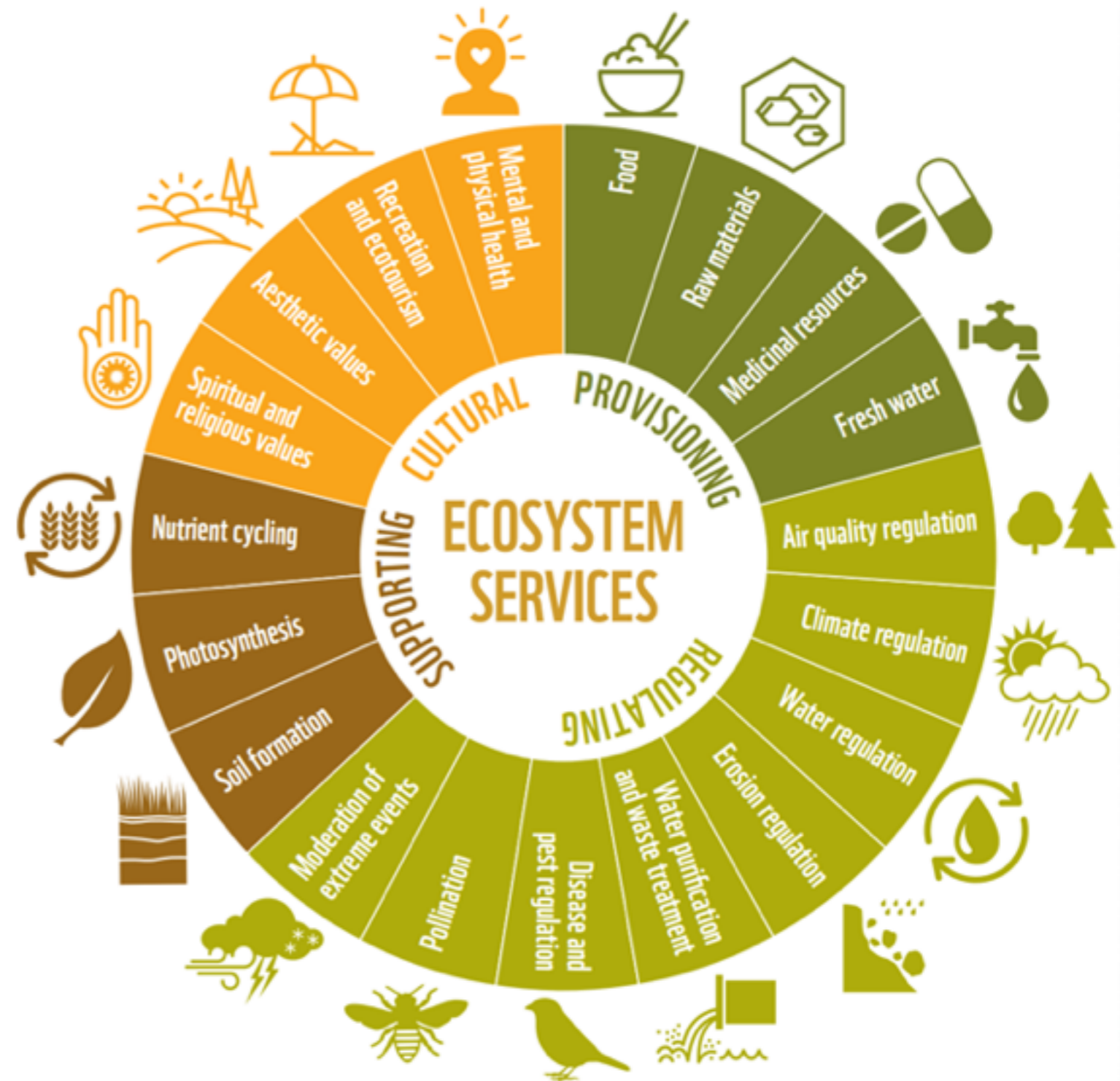
CONSUMPTION as a **Life-Affirming Act:**

APPRECIATIVE of the Living Energies and Living Systems that make human Life and Flourishing possible by seeking to Replenish Ecological Vitality, rather than destructively devour natural creation, as we avail ourselves of its fruits

Natural Diakonia: Ecosystem Services

Eucharistic Ethos:

*Humanity ought to Adopt
an Attitude of Gratefulness
for the Irreplaceable
Services Ecosystems
provide for our Survival*



ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Provisioning services are the products obtained from ecosystems.

Regulating services are the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes.

Cultural services are the nonmaterial benefits people obtain from ecosystems.

Supporting services are those services that are necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services.

Source WWF Living Planet Report 2016, adapted from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005.

Gregory of Sinai (1265-1346) on Consumption

(1) **Self-Control**: one still desires to consume more yet through self-discipline refrains from doing so = {Monastic Ideal}: ***Tempers Our Appetites***

- *Communal Level = Fasting Periods such as LENT & NATIVITY FAST*

(2) **Sufficiency**: no desire to consume more yet is not rendered lethargic & has energy after having consumed.

- Society has enough resources to achieve economic stability and ecological sustainability
= ***LAY / SOCIETAL IDEAL***

(3) **Satiety**: one's consumption has made him feel lethargic so he does not have enough physical or mental energy.

- Satiety on a Collective level = running at a slight deficiencies from time to time -
decreasing efficiency without reaching depletion = ***LIMIT POINT***

Virtues & Ecology

JUSTICE: Creation is Good & Divinely Sanctified = Nature Deserves our Respect, Care & Gratitude for Life

- We must ensure Ecosystems have their NEEDS met in order to continue to Survive & to Flourish
- FUTURE Generations Deserve a Healthy Planet

PRUDENCE: Humanity Depends upon Nature for its Survival & Flourishing (Inter-Dependence with Nature)

- Depletion of Resources & Devastation of Ecosystems will only bring about Future Hardship in the Longterm

Virtues & Ecology

TEMPERANCE: Moderation of our Consumption of Natural Resources & Self-Restraint regarding our Use of Nature

FORTITUDE: We must engage in Critical Self-Reflection & Willingly Alter our Lifestyles in pursuit of common good

- Courage to challenge the Status Quo
- Will-Power to Analyze our Self & change our Behaviors

ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS = ALTERNATIVE TO NEO-CLASSICAL PARADIGM

Stable State as Economic Goal:

- **Recognize Biospheric Limits to Growth**
- **Balance Inputs (Resources) & Outputs (Waste)**
- **Replace GDP (Gross Domestic Product) w/:
GFI (Genuine Flourishing Indicator)**

SATIETY as the LIMIT of Collective Consumption:

“to eat again after reaching satiety is to open the doors of gluttony”

- St. Gregory of Sinai