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Metropolitans John of Pergamon and Kallistos of Diokleia: Animals and Their Place in This World and the Next

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Abstract
This article examines the teachings of Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Zizioulas) and Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia (Ware) on the place of animals in this world and the next. It begins with an examination of their views on the proper interpretation and exercise of human dominion before investigating their views on the inclusion of non-human creatures in the future Kingdom of God. It explores how both metropolitans challenge anthropocentric and hierarchical interpretations inherited from early Greek and Western philosophical frameworks. It outlines their views on the place of animals within the Orthodox tradition of the care of creation that integrates theological reflection, liturgical recognition, and moral responsibility. It concludes with a call from both metropolitans for the need for serious Orthodox engagement and education at all levels on the subject of "creation care" understood at an academic level as ecotheology and animal theology. It is suggested that

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the metropolitans' teachings offer a holistic vision of creation care that situates the Orthodox tradition as a corrective framework to earlier damaging Christian and philosophical teachings, addressing contemporary challenges regarding animal and environmental suffering while remaining faithful to Scripture and patristic teaching.

Keywords: John Zizioulas, Kallistos Ware, Orthodox theology, patristics, dominion, eschatology, souls, ecotheology, animal theology, education

Introduction

This article examines the theological contributions of two of the most significant contemporary Orthodox theologians, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon and Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, on the place of non-human animals within creation and the forthcoming Kingdom of God. Although neither theologian devoted the majority of their scholarly output to what is commonly referred to as animal theology, both made influential, and at times courageous interventions on this subject across several decades, which not only strengthen the Western debate, but also add significantly to the corpus of material available on the developing contemporary Orthodox debate in this field.

To set their work in context, the contemporary debate in Western scholarship began circa fifty-five years ago with the work of Godlovitch & Harris in moral philosophy, *Animals, Men and Morals*;[1] via Singer in philosophy, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics For Our Treatment of Animals*;[2] and of particular relevance for this article, in Christian theology via Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment.*[3] Frankly, all other contemporary work in the field of "animal theology" in the West derives from the large

[1] S. and R. Godlovitch and J. Harris, eds., *Animals, Men and Morals: An Inquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-Humans* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1971).

[2] P. Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics For Our Treatment of Animals* (Avon Books, 1977).

[3] A. Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment* (SCM Press, 1976).

corpus of work by Prof. Rev. Andrew Linzey. In Orthodox theology, this type of engagement did not take place in any academic sense until Gschwandtner 2012,[4] Nellist 2017,[5] and the establishment of the Pan-Orthodox Concern for Animals Charity by one metropolitan, two priests and one presbytera.[6] Since that time, engagement by Orthodox scholars has slowly developed through further work by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware,[7] Nellist,[8] and the more recent work of Asproulis,[9] Goodin,[10] Maroudas,[11] and Seppälä.[12]

It is worth noting that Metropolitan Kallistos' engagement with this topic spans nearly sixty years, and predates Linzey by some thirteen years, beginning with his seminal 1963 article "Saints and Beasts: The Undistorted Image,"[13] *continuing through later interviews and lectures, and culminating in his contributions to volumes in Climate Crisis and Creation Care* published in 2021.[14] Metro-

[4] K. Gschwandtner, *The Role of Non-Human Creation in the Liturgical Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Towards an Orthodox Ecological Theology,* 2012. Durham E-Theses, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/4424 (Hereinafter *The Role*).

[5] C. Nellist, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and Animal Suffering*: *Ancient Voices in Modern Theology* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018). (Hereinafter EOCAS.)

[6] See https://panorthodoxconcernforanimals.org.

[7] Kallistos Ware, "Compassion for Animals in the Orthodox Church," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10:2, 9–24. Available at https://www.orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/2.2019/MetropolitanKallistosWare.pdf.

[8] Christina Nellist, "An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Animal Suffering, Intensive Farming and Climate Change," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 9:3 (2018).

[9] Nikolaos Asproulis, "Animals and the *Imago Dei*: An Addendum to Christian Anthropology," in *Climate Crisis and Creation Care: Historical perspectives, Ecological Integrity and Justice*, ed. C. Nellist (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 20–37.

[10] David K. Goodin, "'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!': John Chrysostom and the Anaphora of Creation in the Hallelujah Psalms," in *Creation Care: Eastern Orthodox Christian Perspectives* (forthcoming, Holy Cross Orthodox Press).

[11] Filotheos-Fotios Maroudas, "The Dominion as a Fraternal Responsibility to Animals rather than a Supremacy," in *Creation Care* (forthcoming, Holy Cross Orthodox Press).

[12] Serafim Seppälä, "Animals as ἄλογα: A Critical Appraisal of a Murky Concept," *Ortodoksia Special Issue: New Approaches to Liturgy and Patristics* (2025), 111–137.

[13] Kallistos Ware, "Saints and Beasts: The Undistorted Image," *The Franciscan*, Vol. V, Autumn, no. 4 (1963): 143–152. (Hereinafter Saints/Beasts.)

[14] Kallistos Ware, "An Integrated Theology: Compassion for Animals," in *Climate Crisis and Creation Care: Historical Perspectives, Ecological Integrity, and Justice,* ed. C. Nellist (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 2–19. (Hereinafter AIT.)

politan John's most direct treatment of animals appears in his essay "Man and Animals," originally written in Greek, but not published until its inclusion in *Priests of Creation: John Zizioulas on Discerning an Ecological Ethos* (2021).[15] However, like Metropolitan Kallistos, this is not the first time he taught on this subject, and the author uses teachings from other works that relate to aspects of flawed historical teachings from both Eastern and Western philosophers and theologians on the meaning of dominion and the status of non-human animal rationality and souls.[16]

Both metropolitans argue against the dominant Christian teachings that have either mistranslated or misinterpreted the correct meaning of dominion and restricted salvation solely to human beings as a result of an over-reliance on the flawed teachings of early Greek philosophers on the link between language and rationality.[17] This well-documented history has resulted in the elevation and separation of humans from the rest of God's cre-

[15] John Zizioulas, "Man and Animals," in *Priests of Creation: John Zizioulas on Discerning an Ecological Ethos*, eds. J. Chryssavgis and Nikolaos Asproulis (T & T Clarke, 2021), 197–202. (Hereinafter Man and Animals.)

[16] E.g., John Zizioulas, "Proprietor or Priest of Creation?" Keynote Address of the Fifth Symposium of Religion, Science, and the Environment (June 2, 2003). Met. John acknowledges that faculties such as intelligence and language, once denied to non-human animals, are found in many species. See note 42 below. Available at: https://www.orth-transfiguration.org/proprietors-or-priests-of-creation/. (Hereinafter Proprietor or Priest.)

[17] Written evidence of the separation of animals from humans is found as early as *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, which describes how humans and animals lived in a pre-verbal state before humans acquired language and the stage before they enslaved and exploited animals. Language is the final differentiation between men and beasts and is important, for historically, it is this supposed lack of language which enabled the dominant Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics to deny animals the ability to think and reason. In light of contemporary scientific research, which allocates these capacities to multiple species of land, air and sea creatures, these ancient assumptions are no longer tenable. See for example, https://royalsocietypublishing.org/rstb/article/375/1789/20190046/23731/Animal-cognition-and-the-evolution-of-human. The historical roots of animals as ἄλογα have been comprehensively discussed in Western philosophy and theology over the past fifty years. In Orthodoxy, Nellist discusses this at length and conducts interviews with Orthodox bishops on the theme as part of her 2018 work (293–308). The excellent 2025 study by Prof. Seppälä brings the Orthodox discussion up to date. See note 12 above.

ation, which in turn has resulted not only in the marginalization of animals and misuse of the wider creation, but also in the treatment of non-human life as theologically or morally insignificant. Both make it clear that animals are integral to God's economy of salvation and are called to transfiguration alongside humanity. Orthodox believe that the whole cosmos is transfigured by Christ's Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. Salvation is not primarily juridical (being freed from guilt) but ontological: all things undergo a process of healing, restoration, and ultimately participation in divine life (theosis) at the eschaton.

At the same time, the article acknowledges that tensions remain, particularly in Metropolitan John's treatment of souls and human uniqueness, which reflect wider unresolved debates within Orthodox theology.[18] By critically engaging these tensions, this article seeks to clarify their positions and contribute to a more coherent and integrated Orthodox theological vision of animals and their place in this world and the next than is currently the case.

When surveying the limited Orthodox literature relating to non-human animals, one usually finds that they begin with the presentation of the monastic/aesthetic traditions, where the saints are offered as exemplars of Orthodox compassionate action. The metropolitans' works cited above are a good example of this type of presentation. This article takes a different approach and begins with the metropolitans' teachings on dominion and souls, as the author believes these are their most significant contributions to contemporary debates relating to non-human animal and environmental suffering, and to the still thorny subject of whether or not non-human animals will be included in the forthcoming Kingdom. It then outlines their views on the place of non-human animals within the Orthodox tradition of creation care that integrates theological reflection, liturgical recognition, and moral responsibility, all of which, the author determines, can form a new and corrective framework for addressing contemporary challenges regarding animal and environmental suffering.

[18] Serafim Seppälä, "Animals as ἄλογα."

The Place of Non-Human Animals in Creation: Dominion and Its Distortions

Modern Eastern Orthodox scholarship now accepts that the interpretation of dominion as domination is an error,[19] as it fails to recognize God's constraints on human freedom and ignores the blueprint of God as Archetype. Patriarch Bartholomew informs us that this blueprint "by definition predetermines an analogous ethos that is imposed upon us."[20] This is an important teaching, which not only supports the premise that our lives/behaviors should reflect the image and likeness of God, but also acknowledges that some historical interpretations relevant to this subject are flawed.[21] It is also commonly accepted that mistranslations or misinterpretations of dominion have for too long shaped Christian reflection on humanity's relationship with creation. The consequences of such distortions for trillions of non-human animals have been profound, and both metropolitans acknowledge this and engage with the issue in their work.

In Metropolitan Kallistos' 1963 article *Saints and Beasts*, dominion/authority over animals is grounded in the image and likeness of God:

> [T]his dominion over the wild creatures which the saints possess reflects the situation of Adam before the Fall. God originally created man to be his vicegerent on earth, to rule over animals and all the universe: this is part of what is signified by the phrase "according to the image and likeness of God."[22]

He goes on to warn us, however, that just because we have been given this exalted position of honor among God's created creatures, we are to remember that we are not the Creator but His servant,

[19] Met. Kallistos, EOCAS:161.

[20] Patriarch Bartholomew, "Environment and Ethic," in *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew,* ed. J. Chryssavgis (Eerdmans, 2009), 135.

[21] Recognition of errors in theological teachings is evidenced throughout the history of the Church.

[22] Saints/Beasts, 150.

> and must therefore treat his master's creation with reverence and respect. In the exercise of his stewardship he should continually be guided by the spirit of compassion: power and authority must be tempered by love. We have been endowed with a priesthood and divine authority over the animals—an authority to protect and to cherish them.[23]

A more recent reiteration of this is a quote from Metropolitan Kallistos' 2014 interview:

> Just as God cares for His creation and loves it, so we, after the image of God, are to care and love creation. This to me is the basic position of the Orthodox Church in regard to animals.[24]

Here, the metropolitan reminds us of the numerous patristic teachings which inform us that, unlike the god of the Gnostics, the Christian God cares for His creation. This Godly care is neither arbitrary nor oppressive but ontological and relational, and based upon Trinitarian reciprocal love which sustains the well-being of all creatures. There is sufficient coverage within patristic teaching on how we should reflect the image and likeness of God in the lives we lead, and there are likewise numerous contemporary teachings on our spiritual failure to reflect God's image in our daily lives resulting in the sin of environmental degradation,[25] so there is no need to repeat that debate here. However, in this field of research it is always prudent to remind ourselves that the early church fathers often gave teachings on the specific or similar themes addressed in this article, and here I am reminded of one such by St. Ephrem the Syrian:

> You are not judge in creation, you have not dominion over the earth. If you love righteousness, reprove your soul and yourself. Be judge unto your own sins, and chastener of your own transgressions.[26]

[23] Saints/Beasts, 152.

[24] Kallistos Ware, interview by Christina Nellist, 2014, in EOCAS, ch. 6.

[25] E.g., in the writings of Patriarch Bartholomew, John Chryssavgis, and Elizabeth Theokritoff.

[26] St. Ephrem, *Three Homilies: On Admonition and Repentance*. CANNPNF 2:13. Catholic Way Publishing, Kindle, 201

In his work *A Theological Approach to the Ecological Problem,* under the section heading "Man's Alienation from Nature," Metropolitan John chooses a quote from Francis Bacon to emphasize the important point he is about to make: "I bring you nature and all its progeny that you may bind it to your service and render it as your slave," and he asks, "Is any more clear proof necessary then as to wherein lies the root of our ecological crisis?" Whilst acknowledging the misinterpretation of dominion, he posits a further question, "Might it not be the dominion of intelligence but rather its misuse that is at fault here?"[27] This important point in part echoes a much earlier teaching on our arrogant misuse of God's creatures by St. Gregory of Nyssa:

> Use; do not misuse; so, too, Paul teaches you. Find your rest in temperate relaxation. Do not indulge in a frenzy of pleasures. Don't make yourself a destroyer of absolutely all living things, whether they be four-footed and large or four-footed and small, birds, fish, exotic or common, a good bargain or expensive. The sweat of the hunter ought not to fill your stomach like a bottomless well that many men digging cannot fill. Our gourmands do not, in fact, spare even the bottom of the sea, nor do they limit themselves to the fish that swim in the water, but they also bring up the crawling marine beasts from the ocean bed and drag them to shore. One pillages the oyster banks, one pursues the sea urchin, one captures the creeping cuttlefish, one plucks the octopus from the rock it grips, one eradicates the mollusks from their pedestal. All animal species, those that swim in the surface waters or live in the depths of the sea, all are thus brought up into the atmosphere. The artful skills of the hedonist cleverly devise traps appropriate to each.[28]

A particular favorite quote of mine is given even earlier by St. Irenaeus who cites scripture when teaching that we should "not

[27] Zizioulas, "A Theological Approach to the Ecological Problem," in *Priests of Creation*, 190.

[28] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Love for the Poor," in *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, trans. S. Holman (Oxford University Press, 2001).

use our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness."[29] Both of these teachings indicate, by their use of language, the saints' views on our misuse of our freedom, which is clearly not in the image and likeness of God. We have therefore teachings not only on the mistranslation or misinterpretation of dominion, but also of our misuse of our role as persons created in the image of God, which both metropolitans believe are major contributors to our ecological crisis and the issue of animal suffering.

In summary, both metropolitans affirm that human dominion over animals and the wider creation is not a license for cruelty, exploitation, neglect, or indifference to animals, but a vocation to exercise compassionate, ascetical service and responsible authority in imitation of God's care for all things in His creation. Both metropolitans agree that when humans assume authority without moral accountability, they replicate patterns of hubris antithetical to the image of God, such as ruthless tyranny, subjugation, or arrogant indifference. Both emphasize that dominion, rightly understood, must reflect the true image of God: loving, compassionate, and relational. Dominion, they argue, is a liturgical and moral act when exercised with loving tenderness, respect, and ethical responsibility.

The Place of Non-Human Animals in the Forthcoming Kingdom

Of crucial importance to the discussion of the status of non-human animals and their suffering is that both metropolitans accept that non-human animals will exist in the forthcoming Kingdom of God. Isaiah 11:6–10 serves as a foundational text for both, and for Metropolitan John it is important enough to begin his article with the full biblical text:

> Wolves and sheep will live together in peace,
> and leopards will lie down with young goats.
> Calves and lion cubs will feed together,
> and little children will take care of them.

[29] Irenaeus, quoting St. Paul in Gal 5:13, in *Against Heresies,* 4.37. 4.

> Cows and bears will eat together,
> and their calves and cubs will lie down in peace.
> Lions will eat straw as cattle do.
>
> Even a baby will not be harmed
> if it plays near a poisonous snake.
>
> On Zion, God's sacred hill,
> there will be nothing harmful or evil.
> The land will be as full of knowledge of the Lord
> as the seas are full of water.
>
> A day is coming when the new king from the royal line of David will be a symbol to the nations. They will gather in his royal city and give him honor.

This text depicts a reconciled and restored creation in which violence has been overcome, predation abolished, and human and non-human animals dwell together in harmony in the forthcoming Kingdom. For both theologians, this eschatological vision is not merely illustrative, it is prescriptive. Metropolitan John explains:

> These words of the Prophet Isaiah (chap. 11, 1–10) so eloquently express the vision of a world where animals and humans *will* live in complete harmony and reconciliation in the kingdom of God.[30]

In his discussion on monasticism, he adds two further important points when teaching that whenever this balance is not achieved or is ruptured, the blame is normally attributed to human beings, and that this usually involves some type of sin for which humans are called to repent.[31] He makes clear that this vision is so important and true to the Orthodox faith and tradition that "This vision has nourished the faith, imagination, and ethos of the Orthodox Church in all facets of its life,"[32] and he offers at least three aspects of the life of the Orthodox Church that bear witness to this vision: its monasticism, its worship, and its theol-

[30] "Man and Animals," 197. My emphasis.
[31] "Man and Animals,", 198.
[32] "Man and Animals,", 197.

ogy. In his discussions on worship, he teaches that humans act as representatives of all creation and that the Orthodox Church does not hesitate to extend its blessing and sanctification "to all the natural elements, including animals and plants."[33]

> Moreover, human beings act in worship as representatives of all creation. We are its voice and mouth, serving as the link that binds creation to God, while offering it a means of expressing this blessing and praise, as well as elevating all of creation with humankind to what constitutes for the Church the utmost perfection and sanctification: namely, transformation by and union with God.[34]

In his discussions on ethics we find a further specific teaching:

> We must move from an anthropomonistic ethics to a more cosmic ethics. Human beings are a part of the natural cosmos, and thus their salvation is a part of the salvation of the cosmos.[35]

As a result of these and many other teachings, Metropolitan John draws our attention to the divine economy which includes all creatures, and where the reconciliation of creation is not limited to human salvation.

Metropolitan Kallistos develops his thoughts on Isaiah's eschatological vision in his 1963 article in a section titled "Adam and the Creatures in Paradise," and is equally clear in his conclusion:

> Redeemed man is not to be snatched away from the rest of creation, but the rest of creation—beasts, birds, and fishes, plants, stones, fire, and water—will be saved and glorified along with him. The whole created universe, as Saint Paul taught, waits with eager expectation for its redemption and transfiguration (Romans 8:19–22). In God's Kingdom that is to come, the animals have their place.[36]

[33] "Man and Animals," 200.

[34] "Man and Animals," 199–200.

[35] Zizioulas, "Ethics or Ethos? A Brief Sketch The Relationship between Ecology and Ethics," in *Priests of Creation*, 158.

[36] Saints/Beasts, 151.

He explains that because Christ at his Incarnation took human flesh from the material order and filled it with the Spirit, Christ transfigured and redeemed all matter, "making it glorious."

> We await not just a new heaven but a new earth; and in that new earth man will exist, not in a vacuum, but surrounded by animals and the rest of God's creation. Between man and beast there will be again, as in the beginning, harmony, and universal friendship.[37]

In his mind, eschatological fulfilment is perceived as a shared destiny. Some fifty-three years later in a 2014 interview[38] he reiterated this teaching when stating that the accounts in the Bible of the age to come make it quite clear that non-human animals will be there. "The ox and the ass, the lion and the lamb will go together. The usual view is to say that they will not be the same animals, but how do we know? And here he asks a highly pertinent and challenging question: "Do we have any right to say that animals do not possess immortality?" Candidly he goes on to state that he knows of no authoritative Orthodox teaching that excludes animals from the future life. On the contrary, he teaches that Scripture and tradition provide "good reason to believe that animals will exist in the future Age after the Second Coming of Christ and the general resurrection... Isa 11:6." [39] He too, explicitly questions theological assumptions, particularly in Western traditions, that salvation and eternal life are reserved for rational human beings alone. Orthodox tradition, as both metropolitans interpret it, provides no basis for such exclusion; rather, it envisions a comprehensive restoration of all created beings. This eschatological affirmation obviously raises questions concerning the status of non-human animal souls; questions that have long preoccupied Christian theologians and philosophers. However, those questions must not obscure the fundamental point of both metropolitans here: that Scripture affirms the presence of animals in the forthcoming Kingdom, regardless of how one conceptualizes the soul.

[37] Saints/Beasts, 151.
[38] EOCAS, ch. 6.
[39] EOCAS, ch. 6.

The Need for Difference: Separation and Souls

Separation

As previously noted, both metropolitans believe that distortions of the concept of "dominion" constitute both a theological and spiritual error. Both also acknowledge the problematic influence of Platonic and Aristotelian thought on early Christian philosophy and theology and observe that the historically dominant philosophy, with its emphasis on rationality, led to the privileging and separating of humans over non-human creatures and in turn, to the claim that only humans possess immortal souls.

> In the age of the Church Fathers, theology was profoundly influenced by Platonism. This inevitably resulted in some ecclesiastical writers considering humans as rational beings possessing an immortal soul and thus surpassing animals and the material world to the extent that the salvation of the world brought by Christ was regarded as being confined to human beings alone.[40]

Metropolitan John informs us that this type of human exceptionalism is evident in the writings of highly influential theologians such as Origen, Evagrius of Pontus, and Augustine of Hippo (and thus Aquinas) and resulted, he argues, in a hierarchical worldview in which animals were generally regarded *at best*, as morally and soteriologically inferior. Metropolitan John notes that whilst dominant Western theological developments reinforced this anthropocentrism (and here he identifies Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, Kant, and Descartes) he reminds us that another, though less influential tradition was available in mainstream Greek patristic thought, and within the official position of the Church, which did not coincide with this position:

> [In] the fourth century, Methodius of Olympus reacts strongly to Origen's philosophy. Furthermore, Athanasius of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor and others speak of "deifi-

[40] "Man and Animals," 201.

> cation" (*theosis*) as communion with the God of all creation.[41]

Furthermore, Metropolitan John goes on to situate these historical philosophical and theological errors within a broader epistemological critique, arguing that human arrogance, coupled with insufficient scientific knowledge and understanding, fostered, and still fosters, persistent misconceptions about animal capacities, rationality, and moral status:

> The emergence of Darwin was needed to provide a critical blow to this arrogant stance by humanity over and against the animals as well as the rest of creation by substantiating how human beings are organically connected to animals, being separated from them—even with regard to conscience and reason—only in degree and not in kind.[42]

To avoid further flawed philosophical and theological distortions, Metropolitan John is clear that the Church and its clergy ought to engage more thoroughly with contemporary science regarding the nature and capacity of non-human beings that demonstrates the continuum between them and humanity—one of *degree* rather than *kind*, in terms of non-human rationality, consciousness, and behavior—rather than as the very criteria used to separate humans from non-human animals these past millennia. These teachings draw our attention to our common ontological interconnectedness and inherent relationality, which provides an Orthodox corrective to what has gone before, and frames the Christian vocation to serve as God's representatives as one of nurturing, protecting, and active participation to ensure the flourishing of creation, rather than its domination and dismissal.

It is clear thus far, and without any detailed discussion of whether or not non-human animals are ensouled or the type of soul they are allocated by humans, that both metropolitans believe that non-human animals will be in the forthcoming King-

[41] "Man and Animals,", 201.

[42] "Man and Animals," 201–2. His reference here is to Charles Darwin, *The Desert of Man*, I, 1898:193.

dom of God, that they participate in the liturgical and moral economy of salvation, and that they share in the ultimate reconciliation of creation. One may hope that the teachings above would have a positive effect upon their colleagues, and thus their subsequent teachings—especially in the realm of bioethics.

Souls

The eschatological inclusion of non-human animals in the writings of Ware and Zizioulas raises important questions regarding the soul, and in particular the nature of the non-human animal soul. An initial point to make here is best put in the form of a question, and is one that is rarely voiced: Who among us has declared that God has revealed to them His heart or mind on this matter? One is also hesitant to voice the obvious but challenging points that there is no universal consensus on the location of the "soul," or theological or philosophical proof of the alleged differences in it, should it exist (here I refer to the ancient Greek tripartite system of souls, with its ungodlike consequences that derive from these differentiations for the unborn but soon to be aborted foetus, and for non-human animals). Yet, despite this great and universal ignorance, we are in the main happy to continue to refuse one specific type of soul to the vast majority of the world's created beings.

In his 2014 interview Metropolitan Kallistos gave the following teaching on this subject:

> Just to say animals have no souls is inadequate, in fact so many of the characteristics that are human are now found to some extent among the animals... In fact any attempt to make a very sharp delineation in light of modern research into animal behavior and intelligence, doesn't entirely work... To say animals don't have reason is also questionable. Again, there is much research in this field... So it seems to me that you cannot make a sharp distinction here either... To me it

> is unsatisfactory to say animals have no souls and we should avoid making such an assertion.[43]

He characterizes debates over non-human animal souls as a "red herring" that distracts from the primary theological imperative, which is the recognition of non-human animals as eschatologically significant participants in God's plan.

As previously noted, in the 1990s Metropolitan John criticized Christian teachings that overemphasized the importance of the "immortal" soul which led to the marginalization of non-human animals and the material world:

> Thus the human being was singled out from created nature as being not only a higher kind of being, but in fact the sole being that mattered eternally—apart, of course, from the angels who, owing to their spiritual and immaterial existence, were of an even higher value than human souls. The Kingdom of God in St. Augustine's vision of the last things has no place at all for nature; it consists of the survival of spiritual beings, the eternal souls.[44]

He deserves credit for his keynote address in 2003, where he acknowledged contemporary scientific insights into non-human animal cognition, behavior, and capacities which he states discredited those damaging historical teachings. He also acknowledged that the majority of philosophers now recognize that animals have almost everything required to possess a "rational soul" as defined by those early philosophers and theologians.[45] However, tensions arise when he subsequently appears to continue this "arrogant" tradition (although he does try to distance himself from it by qualifying his point) when asserting that only humans possess souls in the *fullest sense,*[46] *defined here as existential free-*

[43] EOCAS, 178.

[44] Zizioulas, "Preserving God's Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology," in *Priests of Creation*, 100.

[45] Zizioulas, "Proprietors or Priests of Creation?" Baltic Symposium (June 2, 2003) in *Priests of Creation*, 146–7.

[46] My emphasis is to note yet another change in the alleged criteria for animals to enter "heaven."

dom and the desire for immortality. This time,[47] for him the "most important thing" is not the intellect, which he acknowledges is also found in non-human animals, but freedom:

> *As for the difference* between humans and animals, the most important thing is not so much the intellect, which to a degree is also recognized in animals, but the freedom that only human beings possess in its ultimate, existential form, by experiencing the limitations of personal existence while expressing in diverse ways—including language, art, and tragedy—the desire to transcend these limits by seeking immortality. In this sense, and only in this sense, human beings alone possess a soul.[48]

Here we see exposed the crux of the problem of non-human souls—the constant desire for humans to be acknowledged as different from the other animals, be it within philosophy or theology. And so whilst acknowledging the harmful historical failures of a similar ilk, Metropolitan John opines that human beings again possess something different/unique—and on this occasion this is existential freedom in a manner not fully mirrored in non-human creatures. This is the criterion – "only in this sense" do we find the uniqueness of the human soul. That may be so, but the forensic question to ask here is: Where is the proof or evidence for statements such as these? I return to my opening question: Who among us has declared that God has revealed to them His heart or mind on this matter? Indeed both metropolitans have made this latter point:

> Do we have any right to say that animals do not possess immortality? I think this is a subject where we can simply say, we do not have a clear revelation on this point in Scripture. I cannot recall anywhere where it says animals cannot sur-

[47] He has previously suggested that the ability to create was the characteristic par excellence of humanity. See "Toward an Environmental Ethic," in *Priests of Creation,* 166–7 and "Preserving God's Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology," 120–121.

[48] "Man and Animals," 202. My emphasis.

vive into a future life, so why shouldn't we leave that to God's mercy and say that we don't understand about this?[49]

The Orthodox Church has not assumed an official position on these developments.[50] Personal opinion then, is the matter at hand, and considering the devastating ramifications for billions of creatures, one would hope this would be informed opinion. Despite the teachings above, the question of whether or not animals enter "heaven" is still asked today, and from considerable experience the author believes the all-too-frequent answer from our clergy is likely to be "No." I have earlier written a more detailed exposition on this elsewhere,[51] but to make the point and add context, I will provide just one apposite example of a teaching by Fr. Stanley Harakas who was influential in the world of Orthodox ethics. This is an excerpt from a 2016 short article entitled "Concerning Animals and Pets in Orthodox Tradition."[52] He opines the following under the subheading "Why Pets Do Not Go To Heaven":

> So, when St. John of Damascus speaks about Jesus' Incarnation (the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, taking on human nature), he contrasts the human mind as the image of God, with "the soul of an irrational animal." He says in his Exposition of the Orthodox Faith: "Therefore, God the Word, wishing to restore that which was in His own image, became man. But what is that which was in His own image, unless mind? So He gave up the better and assumed the worse. For mind is the borderland between God and flesh, for it dwells indeed in fellowship with the flesh, and is, moreover, the image of God. Mind, then, mingles with mind, and mind holds a

[49] EOCAS, 303.

[50] "Man and Animals," 201–2. Specifically in his discussion on souls in the section "The Theological Tradition."

[51] EOCAS, ch. 9.

[52] https://catalog.obitel-minsk.com/blog/2016/12/concerning-animals-and-pets-in-orthodox, accessed February 20, 2026.

> place midway between the pureness of God and the denseness of flesh. For if the Lord assumed a soul without mind, He assumed the soul of an irrational animal."

In a second subheading that reinforces his opinion "The Kingdom of God is For Human Beings" he gives this opinion:

> The Kingdom of heaven, then, is for human beings. *We have no evidence anywhere* in the Scriptures or in the Tradition of the Church to support the idea that animals, which do not have a "rational soul," are destined for heaven—or, for that matter, for hell. Only human beings face that double potential destiny. In the meantime, let us enjoy our pets, but not at the expense of our responsibility for our fellow human beings. [My emphasis.]

This explanation and teaching not only ignores the biblical and patristic texts outlined earlier by both metropolitans and a great deal besides, but also various ecclesial texts that we shall explore presently concerning non-human animals recognizing, worshipping, praising, and crying out to God, which as a priest this commentator would have known. Not only do we see that the influence of Greek philosophy spoken of earlier is alive and well and overriding the contemporary science that this teacher and ethicist ought to have been familiar with, but we also find evidence of another problematic teaching: the hierarchy of concern—that is, let us care about animals, but not too much. The suggestion here seems to be that if we care and are compassionate toward non-human animals, as Scripture informs us God is, then in some causal way we will diminish our care and compassion for humans.

Such teachings not only exemplify the problems in the debate on non-human animal souls, but also that the supposed qualifying criteria for entry into the forthcoming Kingdom change. Yet alongside these changing criteria – language, rationality, creativity, etc., there are sufficient and readily available scientific studies that show the existence of said differences in numerous species of animals. These "lines in the sand" are continually redrawn/refined as science continues to disprove various separationist claims. I am not the first to make this point. Theokritoff (2009) informs us of

this unfortunate tendency within this particular Orthodox debate which tends to "draw a sharp distinction between personhood, on the one hand, and the relationships, individuality, and consciousness to be found in animals on the other."[53]

As Theokritoff has observed, Orthodox discussions of personhood and animal life "tend to be vehement," "somewhat circular," and "frequently show little interest in what is actually known about animal behaviour."[54] More fundamentally, the emphasis on souls as passports to heaven distorts the Orthodox understanding of salvation. If non-human animals are affirmed as participants in the forthcoming Kingdom, and souls are required for "entry" then either they possess souls in some meaningful sense, or souls are not the decisive criterion or metaphysical distinction for eschatological inclusion.

There is an obvious response to both of the problems ascribed to Harakas, but certainly not to him alone, and it is this: one of the tenets of Eastern Orthodox Christianity is that Tradition must not contradict Scripture. As both metropolitans clearly affirm, despite the Harakas misrepresentation, there is scriptural evidence of animals in the age to come and there is certainly significant patristic teaching on this point to counter Harakas' opinion. To offer just three examples: St. Irenaeus' acknowledgement that "all things" are recapitulated in Christ;[55] St. Basil of Seleucia's teaching that Christ saved the world and liberated the earth, and recounts all the benefits of salvation including the principle of purification for the world and a "renewing of nature";[56] and St. Cyril of Jerusalem's acknowledgment that "the whole world was ransomed" by Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.[57]

[53] Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 240.

[54] Ibid., 240. There are numerous works dealing with this subject, e.g., C. Allen and M. Bekoff, *Species of Mind: The Philosophy and Biology of Cognitive Ethology* (MIT Press, 1997), and B. Rollin, *The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain, and Science* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

[55] St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Irenaeus: Against Heresies*, 2.2:5.

[56] Basil of Seleucia, *Third Homily on Pascha, Sources Chrétiennes* 187:215.

[57] St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* 13:2.

I conclude this section with the obvious answer to the continuing quest to define the difference between the human creature and non-human animal creatures—and that answer is revealed in Scripture and is a long-established teaching within the Orthodox tradition—via this teaching on difference by Metropolitan John:

> For theology, God is crucial in order to know what the human being is. The human being must emerge as something different, as a different identity with regard to the animals, with regard to the rest of creation, and also with regard to God. Thus man is a link between God and the world. This is what is expressed in theological terms through the concept of the "image and likeness of God."[58]

Herein lies the answer to difference: humans are made in the image of God and that is not said of any other creature. Who we believe our God is will define who we are. Personally, I have never been able to understand why this is insufficient.

To conclude what might be a rather challenging section for some, it can be stated that both metropolitans advance the opinion that non-human animals will take their rightful place in the forthcoming Kingdom of God, and that they believe their teachings are true representations of the Orthodox tradition of an all-loving and relational God who saves all things, despite dissenting voices. For both metropolitans, whether non-human animals do or do not have souls, or what type of souls they are, does not alter this outcome. As Metropolitan Kallistos notes, the debate over non-human animal souls is a "red herring." What matters, he insists, is not assumptions, speculative metaphysics, and separationist theology but fidelity to the biblical and liturgical vision of creation's redemption.[59]

Both are clear that the denial of immortal souls to non-human animals has historically been used to justify exploitation, cruelty, and exclusion, the consequences of which for animals is unneces-

[58] Zizioulas, "Proprietors or Priests of Creation?" 148.
[59] EOCAS, 165–168.

sary suffering, fear, and isolation from their God; outcomes which are incompatible with the Christian proclamation of an all-loving and just God, and of course, His image.

I will add one final note. If animals matter in this life and the next, then this is an inconvenient truth with profound consequences for the many and varied vested-interest groups who abuse animals in order to profit/prosper, and for the wider human population regarding the treatment of non-human animals and human soteriology.

The Place of Non-Human Animals in the Life of the Church: Worship and Sanctification

A further point of convergence between Metropolitans John and Kallistos is their affirmation of the Orthodox tradition which teaches that non-human animals are co-communicants, albeit in ways distinct from humans, within the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

In his discussions on the liturgical life and saints as exemplars of a partially restored prelapsarian state, Metropolitan John gives the following teaching:

> The respect and love toward animals are nevertheless not confined to certain extreme examples or "eccentric" ascetics but actually permeate the Orthodox Church generally in its daily life as well as in the way in its daily prayer and praise.[60]

Unlike Western theological traditions that often separate the sacred and the profane, or restrict participation in the divine economy to human beings, both metropolitans proffer an Orthodox vision which affirms that all creation, human and non-human alike, participate in the glory of God, and is capable of receiving sanctification and intercessory prayers. To buttress this point Metropolitan John points to Holy Saturday which includes the Vespers of Resurrection, as an example of Orthodox integrated theology. Quoting Prophet Daniel (3: 1–23), we are informed that

[60] Man and Animals, 199.

all created beings, "both animate and inanimate, indeed including the animal kingdom and the natural environment," glorify God and celebrate along with humanity.[61] By framing non-human animal participation in worship as normative, Metropolitan John again challenges the anthropocentric bias that treats non-human life as morally and spiritually irrelevant. He states that "the Orthodox Church does not hesitate to extend its blessing and sanctification to all the natural elements, including animals and plants."[62]

It is clear from his teachings that these blessings are not merely symbolic; they indicate an ontological reality in which the sanctifying grace of God touches all creation and reflects the Orthodox Church's refusal to divide reality into sacred and profane realms. Matter itself is called to transfiguration.

Metropolitan Kallistos reminds us that prayers for non-human animals are part of the Orthodox book of blessings and intercessions, known in Greek as the *Evchologion,* and in Slavonic as the *Trebnik* or Book of Needs. He teaches that Orthodox intercessions encompass "the entire created order and this too, is another fundamental element of an integrated Orthodox Christian theology."[63] These prayers clearly indicate the Orthodox recognition that non-human animals matter to God, that their suffering is worthy of intercession, and that divine grace can be invoked on their behalf. Numerous patristic teachings on worship and praise by creation exist and here both St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ephrem speak to the point:

> All things cry out about you
> Those, which speak,
> Those, which cannot think;
> For there is one longing, one yearning,
> That all things have for you. (Rom. 8:22–23)[64]

[61] "Man and Animals," 199.

[62] "Man and Animals," 200.

[63] AIT, 8–9.

[64] Gregory Nazianzen, "Hymn to the God," in *St. Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems,* 4th ed., trans. J. McGuckin (Sisters of the Love of God Press, 2005), 7.

> In the twenty-third year, let the ass praise Him, that gave its foal for Him to ride on, that lost the bonds, that opened the mouth of the dumb, that opened also the mouth of the wild asses.[65]

Other patristic texts indicate that creation has a voice that cries out to God and has human characteristics ranging from fear to joy.[66] This style of commentary exists until today. Metropolitan Kallistos often retells the following account from the monks of the holy mountain of Mount Athos:

> An elder is distracted in his morning prayer by the dawn chorus of frogs from a nearby marsh and sends his disciple to tell them to be quiet until the monks have finished the Midnight Office. When the disciple duly transmits the message, the frogs reply, "We have already said the Midnight Office and are in the middle of Matins; can't you wait till we've finished?"[67]

St. Anastasius of Sinai teaches that not only did creation rejoice, but also that it did so when it learnt of its "transformation from corruption to incorruption."[68] St. Gregory Nazianzen taught that Christ sanctified everything He touched: Christ "sleeps in order to bless sleep," "weeps in order to make tears blessed,"[69] and explicitly links Christ's baptism with the sanctification of the baptismal waters.[70] We have therefore a tradition originating in the

[65] Ephrem the Syrian, *Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ in the Flesh* (Catholic Way Publishing, Kindle, 2014), 13:27.

[66] Andrew of Crete, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies,* ed. B. E. Daley (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 145–146.

[67] Elder Joseph the Hésychaste, "Letter 57," in Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Creation and Salvation in Orthodox Worship," *Journal of Religion, Nature & the Environment,* Vol. 5. 10 (Jan 2001): 97–108.

[68] Anastasius of Sinai, "Joie de la transfiguration: D'après les Pères d'Orient," *Spiritualité Orientale* 39. Coune, D. M. (Ed.) Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine (1985:163), cited in K. Gschwandtner, *The Role.*

[69] Gregory Nazianzen, "On the Words of the Gospel," in *Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Sometime Archbishop of Constantinople* (Catholic Way Publishing, Kindle, 2014), 37.2.

[70] Gregory Nazianzen, "The Third Theological Oration. On The Son," in *Select Orations*, 29.10.

early Church and lasting until today of all creation knowing God, calling to God and blessing and praising God. Certainly, it would appear from some of these texts that they have the capacity to do so independently of humans,[71] and as such speak to an animal's individual integrity and agency. Whilst the author realizes that this suggestion will be problematic to some, it rests in the belief that to deny the possibility of such actions would place limits on God and thus be akin to the heresies the Fathers fought so hard to refute.

The liturgical recognition of non-human animals also aligns with the personalist ontological understanding of the cosmos as inherently relational and sacramental. Early Church fathers repeatedly affirm that creation, in its entirety, bears witness to God's glory and participates in His providential care. Importantly, this theological framework also functions as a critique of broader cultural and philosophical assumptions that have marginalized non-human animals. By integrating non-human animals into worship and recognizing their capacity for sanctification, Orthodox theology challenges utilitarian, anthropocentric, and hierarchical frameworks that have historically justified exploitation. The liturgy is not merely ceremonial; it is, or ought to be, transformative. It helps shape human perception, ethical responsibility, and spiritual imagination, all of which underscore the Orthodox Church's holistic vision of salvation. To engage fully in Orthodox worship is to participate in the moral and ontological affirmation of non-human creation, rather than the separationist/substantialist ontology of the past centuries.

The Place of Non-Human Animals in the Christian Life of Image and Likeness: Love, Reverence, and Respect for Animals

Central to both Metropolitan John's and Metropolitan Kallistos' theological vision is the conviction that love, reverence, and re-

[71] Theodoret makes this same point. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Providentia* 5:33. Seppälä, 2025, 123.

spect for animals constitute an essential expression of Orthodox faith and practice. This affirmation is rooted in the ascetical, liturgical, and biblical traditions of the Church, which for both, functions, or ought to function, as a corrective to anthropocentric and utilitarian assumptions that have historically minimized or ignored the moral and spiritual significance of non-human life. As His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew states in his Encyclical for the 1st of September 2020:

> The struggle for the protection of creation is a central dimension of our faith. Respect for the environment is a praise in practice of the name of God, while the destruction of creation is an insult to the Creator, completely incompatible with the basic assumptions of Christian theology.

The central theme to love, reverence, and respect all creation, including non-human animals, in Metropolitan John's theological anthropology emerges most clearly in his reflections on Orthodox monasticism, where he draws attention to the lives of the great ascetics who exemplified a restored relationship between humanity and the non-human world. He emphasizes that the great ascetics did not merely abstain from harming creation, they actively cultivated a relational ethos in which every creature was recognized as bearing the imprint of God. He reinforces this point by citing the teaching of Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), who famously stated that as one draws nearer to God, one's capacity for love expands to encompass the entirety of creation: "The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field."[72] This teaching emphasizes the transformative and universalizing effect of genuine communion with God: moral and ascetical formation expands the circle of love to include all living beings, without diminishing the special role or responsibilities that humans bear. These ascetics, Orthodox tradition proclaims, provide living evidence that the alienation between humans and non-human animals introduced

[72] Archimandrite Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 469 ff.

by the Fall is neither absolute nor irreversible. The cultivation of such love is understood as part of the Church's spiritual pedagogy, moving both monastics and laypersons toward a holistic vision of creation care.

Metropolitan John makes an important contribution to the theological debate on non-human animal suffering and care in his commentary on *Laudato Si'* when directly confronting the common accusation that such concern for non-human animals reflects sentimentality or emotional excess. He rejects this charge decisively, arguing instead that those who are the exemplars in this field offer love and compassion that arises from loving hearts and the deep spiritual conviction that we share "an organic unity and interdependence that makes us share a common fate just as we have the same Creator."[73] Crucially, he insists that this vision is not merely symbolic or deferred entirely to the future but rather functions as the way humans ought to relate to non-human creation in this life. He further argues that when humans fail to embody reciprocal love and care toward animals, the fault is not morally neutral, but constitutes sin and carries soteriological consequences: "whenever this balance is not achieved, the blame is normally attributed to human beings as a sin for which they are called to repent."[74]

This insistence that failures in human–animal relations are matters of repentance rather than ethical optionality marks a significant departure from approaches that all too often treat animal suffering as morally peripheral. In an interview he gave for the book, *The Orthodox Church Addresses the Climate Crisis,* he states the following:

> Any insult to the creation of God, either by disturbing its natural laws and the damage or extinction of its species, or by the misuse of natural resources, is for the Church an insult to God himself and, therefore, a sin.[75]

[73] https://ec-patr.org/en/21/06/00/00/a-comment-on-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si/.

[74] "Man and Animals," 198.

[75] John Zizioulas, "The Role of Eastern Orthodoxy in Addressing the Climate Crisis:

Metropolitan John's teachings align with a broader Orthodox understanding of sin as relational rupture, not only between humans and God, but also between humanity and the rest of creation. He is clear that if we sin against nature—against non-human animals—there are soteriological consequences for the human.

Metropolitan Kallistos already alluded to these points in his aforementioned 1963 article. He identifies three recurring characteristics exhibited in the lives of Orthodox saints: a vivid sense of affection and compassion for animals, reverence and respect toward them, and dominion through the image of God.[76] Authority, in this context and as noted earlier, is not coercive but restorative; it seeks to establish harmony rather than domination. He reiterates that these qualities are not marginal eccentricities or sentimental, but essential expressions of deep spirituality: "The power of the saints over the animal world is thus an instance of inaugurated eschatology"[77] and exemplifies the Orthodox understanding of our role in God's creation. These qualities flow directly from the Orthodox reading of Genesis, in which the whole creation, including non-human animals, is declared good, sacred, and worthy of reverence and respect:

> The world is God's creation, and it is a good and beautiful world. Therefore, the question of animals and how we treat them, links up with our view that animals are part of God's creation and just as we should treat the whole of creation with reverence and respect, so we should more particularly treat the animals with reverence and respect.[78]

For Metropolitan Kallistos, how humans treat animals is inseparable from how they understand God, since all creatures are sacred and bear the imprint of the Creator. If the world is God's

Interview," interview by Nikolaos Asproulis in *The Orthodox Church Addresses the Climate Crisis,* eds. Theodota Nantsou & Nikolaos Asproulis (WWF Greece & Volos Academy Publications, 2021), 35.

[76] Saints/Beasts, 147.

[77] Saints/Beasts, 151.

[78] EOCAS, 162.

creation, then non-human animals are not disposable resources but fellow creatures—a "Thou, not an It"[79] whose existence glorifies the Creator. Reverence toward non-human animals thus becomes a type of litmus test of theological integrity, not a contemporary innovation or sentimental affectation; it is rooted in the same Orthodox theological anthropology that underpins human virtue and ethical responsibility. In this framework, reverence toward non-human animals is humanity's theological obligation and calling to reflect the image of God. In other words, ethical praxis and liturgical life are mutually constitutive: to fail ethically in relation to non-human animals is simultaneously to fail spiritually.

Thus, both theologians stand firmly within the wider Christian Ecotheological and Animal Theology framework and give legitimacy not only to calls for Eastern Orthodox theological discussions on the subject of non-human animal/creation's suffering but also to the sin at the core of that suffering as frequently articulated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew:

> In this way we will cease whatever we do that furthers the wrong treatment of animals and encourage the individual and social repentance that will bring to animals and all things living the blessings and grace which is due all life.[80]

Both metropolitans also agree with Patriarch Bartholomew that eucharistic worship cannot be separated from ethical and ascetical practice: the way humans live, consume, and respond to creation's vulnerability reflects the authenticity of their worship.[81]

Of equal importance, is Patriarch Bartholomew's teaching that we are to respond to nature "with the same delicacy, the same sensitivity and tenderness, with which we respond to a human being in a relationship."[82] This extension to the normative understand-

[79] EOCAS, 110.

[80] Patriarch Bartholomew, "A Rich Heritage," Address at the Environmental Symposium, Santa Barbara, November 8, 1997, in *Cosmic Grace,* 190.

[81] Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today.* (Doubleday, 2008), 98–103.

[82] Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "On the Theological and Spiritual Insights of Pope John Paul II," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,* ed. J. Chryssavgis (Fordham University

ing of caring relationships might seem a contemporary fashion, yet as both metropolitans demonstrate, this would be a misreading of Eastern Orthodox tradition. Both theologians argue that this ethic of care extends beyond ascetic or monastic contexts to all Orthodox Christians. Prayer, blessing, and ethical responsibility toward non-human animals are not optional, they are essential to the realization of an integrated Orthodox theology of creation.

Rather than excluding non-human animals and reflecting the distorted and fallen image of contemporary societies, when we expand our love and circle of moral concern to encompass all living beings, humans participate more fully in the divine image and thus contribute to the restoration of creation in accordance with God's original plan. Both also agree that the leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church have a significant role to play in reducing that suffering.

Education and Engagement: Or Lack Thereof

This closing section takes us into the future and could have profound implications for all of God's creatures, including ourselves, if enacted. Both metropolitans call for greater engagement by the Church and call for education at all levels. In his 2014 interview, Metropolitan Kallistos responded to social science research which identified a gap between Orthodox theory and practice in relation to care for creation, especially for the non-human animal creation.[83] The outcome of this research was not a surprise, for as far back as 1976 the Russian philosopher Tatiana Goricheva identified problems between Orthodox theory and praxis with regard to the treatment of animals:

> Treatment of animals is an area where there is a disturbing gulf between the implications of our theology and tradition, and the attitudes and behaviour typical of Orthodox societies.[84]

Press, 2011), 297.

[83] EOCAS, ch. 5.

[84] Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation,* 238.

In 2012, Gschwandtner made a similar point:

> It is not clear, however, that these apparently so positive features of Orthodox thought and attitudes have led to greater sensitivity to the environment in its practice or to any clearly articulated ecological theology.[85]

A more current teaching on this point is from Metropolitan Kallistos:

> So, from the tradition of the Orthodox Church, we have plenty of examples of close mutual understanding between humans and animals. The trouble is whilst we have all this in theory, we do not sufficiently apply it in practice.[86]

So what do the metropolitans teach on this final subject? The following are just a few examples.

> There is a need for more education, and we are up against the basic problem that all too many people, clergy, and laity, think as Christians that this does not matter; that the treatment of animals is not a moral issue. But as soon as you say that animals are part of God's creation and we humans have a God-given responsibility towards creation, then at once, one sees that it is both a moral and spiritual question. That is why the Ecumenical Patriarch was so right to insist that the misuse of creation is a sin but all too many people do not see it that way.[87]

> There is need for education here at every level and we should start not with the people in theological seminaries, but we should start much earlier with the children. That the normal catechism teaching given in our Church Sunday School classes should include teaching about the creation and about compassionate and Christian treatment of animals … Then certainly later on when priests are given training, the courses the clergy are given should include teaching on the envi-

[85] Krina Gschwandtner, *The Role,* 8.
[86] AIT, 4.
[87] Kallistos Ware in EOCAS, 164.

> ronment… We should encourage those who have this area of responsibility to educate the children and educate the priests so that they in turn can educate their people.[88]

Metropolitan John makes similar points and reminds us of how the Christian teachings discussed above need to be addressed in order to create meaningful change:

> The ecological problem, therefore, although being a problem of science and therefore to a large degree of ethics, education and state legislation, is also a theological problem. As it is evident that certain theological ideas have played an important role in the creation of the problem, so it must be the case too that theological ideas can influence the course of events in the reverse direction… Without a worldview that involves what we may call a liturgical attitude to creation, it will be impossible to reverse the alarming situation the world is facing today.[89]
>
> The first obvious thing that must follow without delay is a program of education of the clergy in the first place and also at public schools of all degrees. Ecology must permeate all sermons, all Sunday schools, of theological and scientific literature and so forth, wherever and as much as possible. We've been unpardonably incompetent and insufficient in this regard.[90]
>
> The Church cannot be faithful to her mission today without a serious involvement in the protection of God's creation from the damage inflicted on it by human greed and selfishness.[91]

Both metropolitans call for more engagement and more education, and echo calls from past decades, yet the lack of engage-

[88] EOCAS, 171.

[89] Zizioulas, "Preserving God's Creation, Lecture II: Positive Elements from Tradition," in *Priests of Creation,* 106–7.

[90] Zizioulas, "Conclusion: 'From Here to Where?'" in *Priests of Creation*, 224–5. First published in *Sacred Commerce: A Conversation on Environment, Ethics, and Innovation*, eds. John Chryssavgis and Michele Goldsmith (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2014), 97–104.

[91] Zizioulas, "Foreword," in *Cosmic Grace*, viii.

ment by the vast majority of Orthodox Universities and Seminaries remain unchanged. In 2019 Patriarch Bartholomew convened the Halki III Summit to discuss this problem and to encourage engagement, yet at the IOTA conference in Volos in January 2023 a question on what progress had been made was met with silence from the panel, all of whom were at Halki. In a keynote speech by Nellist at a conference on "Ecothology as an Academic Discipline" at the end of 2025, the audience was informed that in the vast majority of cases, Orthodox institutional lack of engagement and education on the subject remained largely unchanged. She also asked why and suggested that this question ought to be put to the institutions to answer. Metropolitan Kallistos attempts an answer regarding this lack of engagement (that goes deeper than one which may offer the dubious excuse of lack of curriculum space), and may well feed into the mindset of those who are responsible for offering Orthodox education to our children, students, and seminarians:

> I think we have to admit that this is not a priority in the minds of some bishops and priests and they might say we are concerned with humans and to that my answer is it is not a matter of either/or, you should be concerned with humans *and* animals. The one does not exclude the other.[92]

Two rather challenging questions to end this section might be: Are our academic and seminary institutions examples of sacred space that ought to reflect the image of an all-loving God in their teachings? If so, are they?

In Conclusion

Metropolitans John of Pergamon and Kallistos of Diokleia were friends and stand together as towering figures in contemporary Orthodox theology. Both helped to bring Orthodoxy into the modern world by engaging with contemporary topics that others ignored until it was fashionable to do so. They were champions of

[92] EOCAS, 161.

freedom of thought in modern scholarship, arguing against teachings that were inherently flawed and based on bad science. In a Church that is perceived to be deeply conservative and traditional, this took great courage. Their reflections and teachings in this article and elsewhere shed light on a critical dimension of Orthodox theology: the moral, eschatological and liturgical significance of non-human creatures.

A central contribution of both metropolitans is their eschatological orientation. Animals, they affirm, will participate in the reconciled Kingdom of God, coexisting with humans in harmony and peace. Metropolitan John stresses that love and respect for animals are essential expressions of the Orthodox faith, imagination, and ethos, all of which are grounded in biblical teachings such as Isaiah's vision of a future Kingdom of God where harmony and reciprocal love and care are restored. This vision is most clearly expressed in the monastic life but is applicable to all Christians.

Metropolitan Kallistos agrees that Isaiah's vision of the forthcoming violence-free Kingdom is an integral part of our Orthodox theology and tradition. For him, the love and fellowship between the saints and non-human animals is a partial anticipation of the situation that will prevail at the Last Day—an instance of inaugurated eschatology. This provides hope that this restored relationship is achievable in this life if we truly exhibit the image of an all-loving and compassionate God. He too discusses love, reverence, and respect for non-human animals in the context of dominion, emphasizing our responsibility as Image to enable the flourishing of all creatures.

Both reframe human dominion as a vocation of care rather than domination, aligning moral responsibility with eschatological hope. Both are clear that dominion rightly understood is one of authority grounded in reciprocal love, rather than the present situation where the majority seem to have forgotten the true image and display the ruptured and distorted image of dominator and ruthless tyrant of nature, causing untold suffering and environmental destruction. For both metropolitans failure to embody this vision and ethos constitutes a sin that requires repentance.

Metropolitan John's engagement with historical philosophical distortions bravely engages contemporary scientific insights, par-

ticularly from evolutionary biology and ethology. He highlights Darwin's work as a corrective to the human-centric hierarchy, demonstrating the continuum between humans and non-human animals in terms of intelligence, consciousness, and problem-solving capacities. Metropolitan Kallistos also acknowledges and accepts the theological implications of emerging scientific evidence that indicates complex cognition, ethical decision-making, and forms of creativity in non-human species, which undermine the rationale for exclusionary claims regarding "immortal" souls. In this context, Metropolitan John stresses that while humans possess existential freedom in an extreme form, manifested in his opinion in self-reflection and the desire to transcend mortality, this distinction does not diminish the moral or eschatological significance of non-human life.

Metropolitan Kallistos' insistence on moral and ethical inclusivity also challenges anthropocentric and hierarchical paradigms that have historically marginalized non-human life. He too, bravely argues that debates over whether animals possess immortal souls are a "red herring" that diverts attention from the more pressing ethical and theological imperative: the recognition of non-human animals as morally and eschatologically significant. He emphasizes that biblical and Orthodox tradition, properly understood, allows for the inclusion of non-human animals in the Kingdom of God regardless of philosophical assumptions about the nature or existence of their souls. The ethical implications of this discourse are profound. The denial of immortality to non-human animals, (as exemplified by the Harakas article above, or the ancient teachings of Plato and Aristotle) has historically facilitated cruelty, neglect, exploitation, and theological indifference, as it provided a theological justification for treating these creatures as morally and spiritually irrelevant. By contrast, the recognition of non-human animals' moral and eschatological significance, whether or not coupled with the attribution of immortal souls, offers a corrective framework which demands compassion and ethical engagement.

Their work emphasizes that non-human animals are neither incidental nor instrumental in the divine economy. They chal-

lenge entrenched assumptions and recover a deeply patristic vision of creation as beloved, sacred, and destined for transfiguration. By asserting the eschatological significance of non-human animals, they provide a long-overdue corrective to the flawed philosophical and theological teachings of the past concerning the place of animals in this world and the next. Their teachings on non-human animals take us back to earlier periods of the Church before the grip of flawed Greek philosophical teachings strangled any theological debate on souls and salvation for the wider creation. By engaging with both biblical and patristic sources, as well as contemporary scientific insights, these masterful theologians offer a holistic vision of Orthodox Christianity that if followed, is spiritually transformative. The Orthodox vision that they offer is a long-overdue corrective that provides a theological foundation for contemporary creation care and animal ethics within Orthodox praxis.

Both metropolitans continually call for more Orthodox engagement and education on what is generally referred to now as ecotheology and animal theology, but which at their core is what Orthodoxy understand as reflecting the Image and Likeness of God in our lives. Both acknowledge that Orthodox engagement is lacking and well overdue and let us hope that this article reminds those with that responsibility to respond to the numerous calls from them, and many others besides, over these past decades.

Their desire to speak the essential truth of the gospel—of the universal love of God—was paramount in their lives. Their integrity cannot be questioned. Metropolitan John's words, echoed by Metropolitan Kallistos elsewhere, offer a fitting final statement:

> Still, these particular characteristics of human beings do not give them any right to despise or any authority to diminish animals. On the contrary, human beings are obliged to embrace animals and all creation with affection and compassion in an effort to deliver them from the corruption and mortality that torment creation in its entirety (cf. Rom. 8:20–21).[93]

[93] "Man and Animals," 202.

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