



DESMOS
INTERNATIONAL LINK
OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN SCOUTS
LE LIEN INTERNATIONAL
DES SCOUTS ORTHODOXES

5TH DESMOS CONFERENCE
JULY 13, 2008
JEJU ISLAND, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

The 5th DESMOS CONFERENCE was held on July 13, 2008, in the premises of the International Convention Centre (ICC), on JEJU Island, Republic of Korea.

As usual, the Desmos Conference preceded the World Scout Conference, whose official opening ceremony was scheduled for the next day.



Wishing to enable as many as possible participants from as many as possible countries to take part at the 5th Desmos Conference, and considering the fact that many of the delegates had to make quite a long trip to reach Korea, the beginning of the Conference was scheduled for late afternoon, at 17h. And yet, quite a number of delegates to the World Scout Conference was still arriving during the afternoon and the evening, so the number of participants at the 5th Desmos Conference was not as expected. However, the Conference had enough countries present in order to carry on its legitimate work.



DESMOS Secretary General welcomed all the delegates and expressed gratitude for the efforts made in order to come to JEJU Island in time to take part at the DESMOS Conference, and suggested to the Conference as the items for the Preparatory session the following:

PREPARATORY SESSION

- Meditation, Minute of Silence
- Appointment of Tellers
- Election of the Conference Chairman, Vice Chairman, Reporter and Assistant reporter
- Appointment of the Resolutions Committee
- Approval of the Agenda

The items for the Preparatory session were accepted.

DESMOS Secretary General said the Prayer:

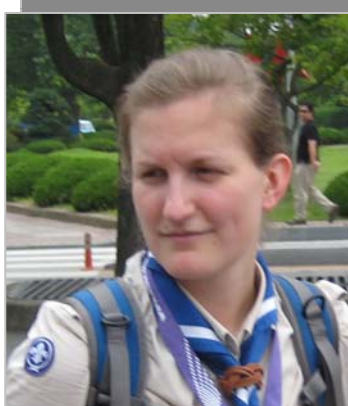
*Thank you good Lord,
 for gathering us here
 in wonderful JEJU island,
 for giving us strength and will
 to work together on Desmos issues, on its further development
 and prosperity.
 Let us find within ourselves
 the additional motivation to work with commitment
 for the benefit of Orthodox Youth in Scouting.
 Amen*

The delegates of the 5th Desmos Conference then had the Minute of Silence for all the Scouts and Scouters that passed in the Hands of our Lord in the period since the previous Desmos Conference held in Tunisia in 2005.



As the Tellers, the Conference appointed **Miss Marion Karali** from Greece and **Mr. Milos Ristic** from Serbia.

DESMOS President and DESMOS Secretary General suggested **Mr. Constantinos Tsolakidis**, Member of the Board and International Commissioner of Soma Hellinon Proskopon (Scouts of Greece) to chair the 5th Desmos Conference, which the Conference unanimously accepted by acclamation.



The Conference appointed as Reporter **Mr. Marko Petrovic** from Serbia and as the Assistant Reporter **Mr. Nassos Efstathiou** from Greece.

The Chairman of the 5th Desmos Conference, Mr. Constantinos Tsolakidis, after welcoming participants to Jeju Island, expressed his thanks to the Conference for the granted confidence and suggested the Conference Agenda, as it was previously announced.

There were no other Agenda suggestions, except for the cancelation of the address of Desmos Vice-Chairman, which, for reasons beyond his will was unable to take part or convey his Address to the Conference on time. Also, it was suggested to cancel the coffee break and work continuously, in order to make the most of the time available.



The Conference accepted the following Agenda:

PLENARY SESSION I

- Ad. 1** Address by DESMOS Chairman Mr. Christos Papageorgiou
- Ad. 2** Report of the Treasurer
- Ad. 3** Report of the Secretary General
- Ad. 4** Welcoming the New Members
- Ad. 5** Amendments to the Constitution – Honorary Committee members

PLENARY SESSION II

Ad. 6 Discussion area 1: *Creating a Better World – Orthodoxy and Environment*
Presentation by the representative of the Orthodox Church in Korea, followed by discussions and contributions

Ad. 7 Discussion area 2: *DESMOS Future Events* - Presentation by Christos Papageorgiou, Desmos President

Ad. 8 DESMOS COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

FINAL SESSION

- Other items
- Resolutions
- Announcements

CLOSING

Ad. 1 – Address by CHRISTOS PAPAGEORGIU, Desmos President

DESMOS President, **Mr. Christos Papageorgiou**, addressed the Conference. Desmos President welcomed all the delegates and guests from ICCS and IUMS, expressing special gratitude to His Eminence Metropolitan Sotirios, who expressed best wishes for the success of the Desmos Conference, and to Rev. Daniel Na, Orthodox Priest at St. Paul Orthodox Church in Incheon, Korea, and Vicar General of the Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, who took part at the 5th Desmos Conference on behalf of His Eminence The Metropolitan.

Christos Papageorgiou briefly presented the history of Desmos, and pointed out that, after years of committed work, Desmos is nowadays visible and fully present in the world of Scouting, keeping on seeking for appropriate ways to present to the children in our Movement the idea of Orthodoxy.

Christos said that the efforts invested in development of our Link resulted in Desmos' privileged and respected position in the world of Scouting nowadays, but also out of Scouting.

Christos emphasized the fact that Desmos established excellent relations with ICCS and IUMS and is considered as a real partner in joint efforts aiming to improve the spiritual dimension of Scouting. Desmos President pointed out the importance of joint work on spiritual development in Scouting and reminded to one of the basic principles of our Movement - "Duty to God".



Christos reminded that we need to thank all the Desmos activists that helped us realize our projects and activities in the period between the two

Desmos conferences and that Desmos expresses special gratitude to His Holiness The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew the 1st, for understanding and cordial support.

Desmos President said there was a number of significant events in the last triennium, between Tunisia and Korea, in which Desmos actively participated, and, as the most important, he indicated the following:

- **The 2nd Scout Inter-religious Symposium**, held in Fo Guang Shan Temple, Kaoshiung, Taiwan, in May 2006
- **World Scout Inter-religious Forum**, held in London, UK, 16 - 19 November 2006
- **The 21st World Scout Jamboree** in United Kingdom, in July/August 2007.

Desmos President said we should keep in mind that we're all involved in Scouting for the sake of children and emphasized that there's no future without the youth.

Therefore - Desmos President said - we must offer the vision to our young leaders. We have to bear it in mind while designing the Programme and while preparing scout activities. We have to look forward, towards the next step, we have to act in accordance with the official scout motto "Creating The Better World".

Scouting is a philosophy – Christos Papageorgiou said - and part of it is the spirituality. But, we need to implement in practice the Duty to God. Accordingly, we need to be aware of the importance of training. He said the training opens our minds, urges our efforts and gives us indispensable knowledge. Therefore, the training of our leaders must be one of the activities we should focus on in the forthcoming period.

Desmos President also informed the Conference about the achievements of recently established "Friends of Desmos" in Greece.

The will and efforts of a group of eminent Greek scout enthusiasts resulted in official establishing of the "Friends of Desmos", organization with the aim to support Desmos activities and help the Link's further development for the benefit of Orthodox boys and girls in Scouting. The FoD goal is to attract as many as possible new fee-paying members in order to establish a solid fund, which would be used for financing Desmos activities. Although established not so long ago, "Friends of Desmos" in Greece already covered expenses for Desmos representatives at the Taiwan Inter-religious Symposium and London Inter-religious Forum, as well as for Desmos participation at the World Scout Jamboree 2007 in UK. But the FoD role actually reaches beyond, since the reputation of its members guarantees a successful promotion of Scouting and of our Link. The example of Greece should be followed by other Desmos countries, since it would help in creating much better environment for development of our Link. Therefore, Christos Papageorgiou encouraged all Desmos members to make efforts and try to motivate committed people in their countries from both Scouting and the community to establish "Friends of Desmos".



The Address of the DESMOS President was followed by the PowerPoint presentation, offering an overview of DESMOS activities over the last three years with the emphasis on the DESMOS participation at the World Scout Jamboree in England in 2007 and its contribution to the celebration of the Centenary of Scouting.

Ad 2. – Report of the Desmos Treasurer

Since Desmos Treasurer, Mr. Christos Marneros, was not able to attend the Conference, he sent the written report ([Appendix 1](#)), which was read to the Conference.

The Conference adopted the Report of the Treasurer.

Ad. 3 - Report of the DESMOS Secretary General, Mr. Marko Petrovic

Desmos Secretary General, **Marko Petrovic**, welcomed the delegates and the guests, pointing out the presence of ICCS and IUMS representatives, as well as the presence of Vice-Chairman of the European Scout Region Mr. MARIOS CHRISTOU. Desmos Secretary General expressed special thanks to Rev. DANIEL NA who reserved time and invested efforts to come to Jeju Island, be with us and give his contribution to the success of the 5th Desmos Conference.

Desmos Secretary General expressed gratitude to the Korea Scout Association for understanding and support in organizing the 5th Desmos Conference, and especially to Mr. SIMON RHEE, KSA International Commissioner and President of the 38th WSC's Organizing Committee, who helped very much the organization of this event.

Desmos Secretary General emphasized the high reputation Desmos gained in previous period working strongly in favor of the inter-religious dialogue with other faith organizations in Scouting and emphasized the importance of continuing that way. Such approach confirms Desmos' devotion to the values of the Orthodox Faith and to the values of Scouting.

Desmos Secretary General said one of the very important achievements in previous period was the establishing of Desmos web site, which became operational shortly after the previous Desmos Conference in Tunisia, and right after the Desmos Committee meeting held in Serbia, in January 2006.

He pointed out that the web site, which has a good and easy-to-remember domain DESMOS.INFO, is Desmos' window towards its membership, but also towards all public interested to find out more about our Link, both scouts and non-scouts, and that we need to make additional efforts in order to improve and enrich the Desmos web site.



In the past trienium, Desmos took part in a number of events, on European and World level:

- **The 2nd Scout Inter-religious Symposium**, held in Fo Guang Shan Temple, Kaoshiung, Taiwan, in May 2006
- **The World Scout Inter-religious Forum**, London, UK, 16-19 November 2006
- **The 19th European Scout Conference**, Portoroz, Slovenia, May 2007
- **The 2nd Orthodox Youth Conference**, Istanbul, Turkey, July 2007
- **The 21st World Scout Jamboree**, United Kingdom, July/August 2007

- **The World Inter-religious Forum**, Geneva, Switzerland, November 2007
- **The World Scientific Congress**, Geneva, Switzerland, November 2007
- **The European event on Youth Programme development** (including Spiritual dimension), Kandersteg, Switzerland, December 2007
- **The Ecumenical Seminar Encounter**, Canterbury, England, March 7 - 9, 2008

In addition, three regular annual meetings of the Desmos Executive Committee have been realized – Serbia in 2006, Cyprus in 2007 and Jordan in 2008.

The main focus of the International Link of Orthodox Christian Scouts DESMOS in the past triennium was on preparation and participation at the 21st World Scout Jamboree, which was held in England, July 27 - August 8, 2007. Desmos Secretary General said some of the facts regarding this event were already offered in the presentation of Desmos President Christos Papageorgiou. However, Desmos Secretary General stressed upon the general perception of the "Faith and Beliefs Zone" as the Jamboree programme segment, and upon the Desmos role in the great success of that programme segment. He said that Desmos was really very successful at the 21st World Scout Jamboree and that it's not just the opinion of Desmos people, but the opinion of all those who did the appraisals of the Jamboree results on different levels.

Regarding the coming triennium, Desmos Secretary General reminded that a number of very important events will be organized on the World and European level, in the period until the next Desmos Conference in Brasil in 2011.

In the period until the next Desmos Conference, we have the European Scout Conference in Belgium in 2010, the World Scout Conference in Brasil in 2011, and the World Scout Jamboree in Sweden in 2011. Those are all events in which Desmos must take part. Equally important is Desmos participation at faith-organizations' events, such as: The 3rd World Scout Inter-religious Symposium, The World Scout Inter-religious Forum, the 2nd Ecumenical encounter, etc.

However, we must not forget the Desmos activities we need to organize in Desmos member-countries and between the Desmos member-countries. It is something that should offer our youth the possibility to get in touch with the spiritual dimension in Scouting in a practical manner. It is something that should enable exchange between Desmos member-countries and make them closer to each other. It may be the positive impulse for certain inactive Desmos member-countries and the way to motivate them and get them back.

Desmos Secretary General was also speaking about the strengths and weaknesses of The Link in the period between the two Desmos conferences.

Speaking about strengths, he pointed out Desmos' achievements at the world level, where Desmos gained the consultative status with WOSM, very good relations with other faith organizations in Scouting that consider Desmos as respectable partner, and Desmos participation at world and regional events, such as World scout conferences, European scout conferences, world scout jamborees and EuroJam.

Speaking about weaknesses, Marko emphasized the financial problems and lack of support of most of the NSOs Desmos members. In that regard, Desmos Secretary General welcomed the positive results achieved in Greece through establishing of the



"Friends of Desmos", which was presented to the Conference by the President Christos Papageorgiou, and said we should encourage the others to follow the example of Greece.

Marko Petrovic also pointed out that Desmos needs to work more seriously on the issue of human resources in the forthcoming period.

Closing his address, Marko said it was a challenge and a pleasure working for the cause and development of The Link over the past three years.

Ad. 4 - Welcoming the new DESMOS members

The Conference warmly welcomed the interest expressed by the new WOSM members - **Montenegro, Ukraine** and **Syria** – to join DESMOS, and encouraged the representatives of those countries to complete all admission formalities.

Ad. 5 - Amendments to the Desmos Constitution

The Conference was offered the Amendment to the Constitution related to the Honorary Committee Members. The idea was presented and explained by Desmos Secretary General, who said that the Committee identified the need to find the way to retain the committed people ready to work for the benefit of Desmos and contribute to its development although not having a formal position in Desmos structures. Desmos Secretary General emphasised that Desmos really needs such committed people and the possible solution was identified in introducing the institution of Honorary Committee Members that would have the opportunity to attend the Desmos Committee sessions and be fully involved, but without voting rights.

The Chairman of the Conference, Mr. Constantinos Tsolakidis, read the draft text of the Amendment:

"A. Proposed Amendment to Article III of the Demos Constitution. Addition of a new Sub-Article III.5:

Honorary Membership Status

The Conference can grant Honorary Status to individuals, members of NSOs or non members of NSOs, who have contributed to the development and rendered exceptional services to DESMOS. Honorary Members may take the floor upon invitation from the Chairman, but may not have voting rights.

B. Renumbering of existing Article III.5 to Article III.6. Inclusion of 3 (three) words next to the title 'Loss of Membership':

Loss of Membership and Honorary Status.

C. Addition of a new Sub-Article in Article IV, numbered as Sub-Article IV.10:

To grant Honorary Membership Status to individuals."

Mr. George Hourdakis, Vice-Chairman of the National Board of Soma Hellinon Prokopon (Greece) and DESMOS delegate, pointed out that the idea is welcomed, but he suggested to limit the mandate to a certain period.

The Conference accepted the presented Amendment as well as Mr. Hourdakis' proposal, which after clarifications referred to Co-opted Members. The final text of the accepted Amendments is given in Appendix 2.



Ad. 6 Discussion area 1: Creating a Better World–Orthodoxy and Environment

With the kindness of His Eminence **Metropolitan Sotirios of Korea**, who understood the importance of having the representative of the Orthodox Church at the Desmos Conference in Korea, the Vicar General of the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, Rev. DANIEL NA, attended the 5th Desmos Conference.



Desmos Conference welcomed with great pleasure Rev. DANIEL NA, and expressed to him the gratitude for coming to JEJU Island specially to offer the presentation on a very actual issue, as the Key-Note speaker.

Rev. DANIEL NA presented to the Conference the extraordinary presentation "ORTHODOXY AND ENVIRONMENT" ([Appendix 3](#)).

Ad. 7 Discussion area 2: DESMOS Future Events

The presentation on this item was prepared and offered to the Conference by DESMOS President, Mr. Christos Papageorgiou.

Desmos President indicated the most important events Desmos should take part in the next triennium:

- Joint Training DESMOS-ICCS, Madaba, Jordan, July 2009
- 3rd World Scout Inter-religious Symposium, October 2009 (place to be decided)
- 2nd Ecumenical Encounter, Greece, 2010
- 20th European Scout Conference, Belgium, 2010
- 6th Desmos Conference, Brazil, 2011
- 39th World Scout Conference, Brazil, 2011
- 22nd World Scout Jamboree, Sweden, 2011

Besides the mentioned events – Desmos President said - we need to keep in mind the need to organize as many as possible Desmos activities for young people in Desmos countries, including cross-border activities. Initial experience with cross-border activities organized by some Desmos countries proved to be very successful and it is one of the activities we should make traditional in future.

We also need to organize the training on spiritual dimension in Scouting in Serbia, which could cover all Balkan countries Desmos members, and which was already planned before. This is essential considering the importance of training for our leaders.

Ad. 8 DESMOS COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

The following Desmos countries with voting right were represented at the Conference: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Israel (by Proxy), Lebanon (by Proxy), Macedonia (FYRO), Palestine Authority (by Proxy), Poland (by Proxy), Serbia.

After the voting procedure, the Tellers reported to the Conference the elections' results. The Conference elected with the needed majority, for the period of three years, the following DESMOS Committee members:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. ABBOUD Georges | Lebanon |
| 2. JEFTIC Goran | Bosnia&Herzegovina |
| 3. MITSIDES Nicolaos | Cyprus |
| 4. PAPAGEORGIOU Christos | Greece |
| 5. PETROVIC Zoran | Serbia |
| 6. SAHLIEH Maher | Palestinian Authority |
| 7. SHAHADA Naaman | Israel |

The Conference welcomed the newly elected DESMOS Committee members.

FINAL SESSION

CLOSING

The Conference was closed around 20h30, in good spirit and with the commitment to invest more efforts in DESMOS development in the forthcoming period, in order to strengthen the Link and achieve better results.

***FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE DESMOS TREASURER
Mr. CHRISTOS MARNEROS***

Dear friends,

At first I apologise for my absence from this Conference but my absence is due to reasons over and above of my personal will.

The financial aspects of the Link are a serious problem and should be consider the soonest possible. Unfortunately this situation is not different from that in previous years. It remains the same without any serious change.

In any organisation, corporation, club etc, the financial state is the basic cause of the success or failure to obtain the purposes or the targets. In our Link we need much money to cover the expenses for meeting, conferences, symposiums, forums etc. in various countries and we have not these funds. If we will not find a solution on this problem, I am afraid that the Link will not meet its targets. The only modification in the financial position of DESMOS is the establishment of an association (club) in Greece under the name "FRIENDS OF DESMOS" having as its main purpose the financial support of "DESMOS".

I believe that it is not difficult, if we try to establish the same club in the other member countries of the LINK.

The summary of the articles of the Association that was translated in English was handed to the members at the Committee meeting at Maadaba, Jordan (21-23 February 2008).

The expenses of DESMOS are amounting to many thousands of EURO, which are covered by the members of the Committee or their National Associations, in order to participate in the meetings or to host the annual Committee meetings. For the participation of "DESMOS" in conferences, symposiums, forums, interreligious conferences, etc, the expenses are covered by the Scouts Association of Greece, having the support of the Association "FRIENDS OF DESMOS", which was established in Athens two years ago. A lot of money is spent for these expenses.

We express our deep thanks to the Scouts Association of Greece and to the Association "Friends of DESMOS". Without their support it would have been impossible for "DESMOS" to participate in all the above noted activities.

As Treasurer, I did not administrate any amount of money and so I shall not present to you any statement or account of Receipts and Payments.

I express my best wishes for a successful World Conference of "DESMOS" in Korea.

Christos Marneros
Treasurer of DESMOS
07/07/08

AMENDMENTS TO THE DESMOS CONSTITUTION

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- B. Renumbering of existing Article III.5 to Article III.6. Inclusion of 3 (three) words next to the title 'Loss of Membership':
Loss of Membership and Honorary Status.
- C. Addition of a new Sub-Article in Article IV, numbered as Sub-Article IV.10:
To grant Honorary Membership Status to individuals.
- D. Addition of a new Sub-Article in Article VI, numbered as Sub-Article IV.2:
The Committee has the right to co-opt a maximum of 2 non-voting members.
- E. Addition of a new Sub-Article in Article VII, numbered as Sub-Article VII.11:
To co-opt non – voting members to the Committee.
- F. Addition of a new paragraph in Article X:
The term of office for the co-opted members to the Committee is for a period of 3 years, in line with the term of office of the DESMOS Committee.

***PRESENTATION OF REV. DANIEL NA
Vicar General of the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea***

Orthodoxy and the Environment

It is an honor and privilege to introduce this very important issue, "Orthodoxy and the Environment", which I shall do on behalf of H. E. Metropolitan Sotirios who has asked me to represent him in this meeting.

Coincidentally in Korea on 15th May of this year at the Catholic Cathedral in Seoul, Korea, the Ecumenical Movement of the Christian Churches in Korea organized an International Forum on "Diversity of Ecology-Spirituality in Christianity". For the forum, an hegoumeni (abbess) of the Holy Convent of Chrysopigi, Chania, Crete, Mother Theoxeni, came to Korea to present a paper on the topic.



I shall take this opportunity to read excerpts from it here now.

From the point of view of Orthodox theology and tradition, the pollution of the environment does not mean only the destruction of nature, but above all signifies man's repudiation of his task to sanctify the world. The misuse of creation manifests precisely this: contemporary man's refusal to comprehend his spiritual destiny and to place himself and his environment in dependence on God the Creator; contemporary man's insistence on remaining trapped within a materialistic conception foreign to any spiritual perspective.

An ascetic and eucharistic relationship to the world is accordingly a vital need of our times. This can be and must be the task of the Church which, according to the apostolic tradition, in all her sacraments employs matter with a view towards the sanctification of the material world.

Innumerable miraculous interventions in the life of the Orthodox Church take place through material means which are sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The conservation of nature and the sanctification of the environment are expressed during the Divine Liturgy (in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist) when God transforms the gifts of bread and the wine that we offer to him. At the sacrament of Holy Baptism,

water becomes a means for the salvation of the human race and of the whole of creation. At the sacrament of Holy Unction, oil is the material means whereby the Church heals and sanctifies the faithful.

At the Divine Liturgy, the Church invites the faithful to be healed and renewed, and blesses them to go out into the world. The whole fragmented world can then hope and be transfigured. This is why during the Liturgy the priest prays "for the peace of the whole world"; it is for the world to live authentically, freed from the shadow of the fear of corruption and death.

The problem of the destruction of the environment is accordingly a sacramental and theological issue that has been of concern to the Church. The Church has always had an environmental sensibility. Our saints were always reconciled with nature. Throughout the ages, they have regained a life in a state of paradise within nature. There are saints who have walked on water, saints who have struck rocks in the desert with their staffs causing the waterless lands to give forth water, saints who have ended drought with their prayers, and saints who have received food from angels.

Throughout the ages, our saints have had a deep understanding and empathy for nature as a creation, the work of God. Saint Isaac the Syrian said that "a compassionate heart is one that burns for the whole of creation", and Saint Silouan of Mount Athos taught that not even a single leaf should be cut from a tree needlessly

For two thousand years, the Orthodox Church has been preaching the sanctity of God's creation and has been guiding the faithful with the enduring words of Holy Scripture and of the Church Fathers.

Known as the "Green Patriarch", our Patriarch Bartholomew holds the issue of the environment and its conservation among his highest priorities. During his fifteen years in office, he has led many international initiatives around the world to save seas that are in danger, forests that are disappearing, sacred sites that are in danger from secularization.

Elder Porphyrios (1906-1992), a contemporary saint of the Orthodox Church who lived in Greece, discerned through the grace of God that the cave area is sanctified and foresaw that it will become a place of reconciliation with nature when it will again become a place of prayer accessible to people. With his great sensitivity and love, the blessed elder Porphyrios had a special gift of discovering in nature some ways in which we can approach God. The beauties of nature, the saintly elder used to say, are "droplets of God's love".

Elder Porphyrios' teaching, titled *Words on Creation*, speaks as follows:

“Take joy in all things that surround us. All things teach us and lead us to God. All things around us are droplets of God’s love – things living and non-living, the plants, the animals and the birds, the mountains, the sea, the sunset and the starry sky. They are little loves that lead us to the great love, to Christ. The flowers, for example, have their grace, they teach us with their fragrance, with their magnificence. They speak to us of the love of God. They scatter their fragrance and their beauty on sinners and on the righteous alike.

“Rise early in the morning to see the sun emerge as king, purple-clad, from the ocean. Whenever a beautiful landscape fills you with enthusiasm, a little chapel, something exquisite, do not leave things at that, but go beyond them, proceed to thanksgiving and praise for all beautiful things, so that in them you experience him who alone is ‘comely in beauty’.

“The spiritual man, he who has the Spirit of God, is alert wherever he goes; he is all eyes, all sensitivity to fragrance. All his senses are alive, but they are alive with the Spirit of God. He is different. He sees everything and hears everything. He watches the birds, the rock, the butterfly ... He passes by somewhere, and he senses something, the fragrance of a flower, for example. He lives in and through everything – the butterflies, the bees. Grace gives him awareness. He desires to live with all things. When I was on the Holy Mountain, the birds of the forest used to inspire me. Go and listen to the nightingales. Even if you have a heart of stone you will be moved.”

Very characteristic is Elder Porphyrios' mode of healing souls through reference to nature. Elder Porphyrios called nature “a hidden Gospel”, teaching people that through nature we can discover God. He would encourage those who sought his advice – and thousands of people from all over the world would come to him – to walk on the hills, to plant trees, to conserve water, the springs, the rivers and the sea, and to love the birds and animals as well as people. He frequently advised people who suffered from bodily or mental illnesses (depression, etc.) that they should live or work close to nature for healing. He would also encourage people in positions of responsibility – and many such would visit him – to take measures to protect the environment because this accords with the will of God.

The conservation of the sacredness of the world is also sought through the art of Orthodox icon-painting. The painting of Orthodox iconography combines the traditional treatment of subjects with a theological intervention and interpretation about issues of

concern to people of the present-day: social, ecological and eschatological issues. Accordingly, the Creation is depicted to show how God made it “very good”. The sacraments are depicted, as they sanctify and bless man’s path in life along with material things. The saints are represented, who through the grace of God acquired intimacy with the natural world and the elements of nature, such as, for example, Saint Seraphim of Sarov who fed a wild bear with his hands and Saint John the Hermit of Crete who walked on the sea.

The Orthodox ascetic experience and tradition open up pathways for us to follow with spiritual vigilance and upwards struggle to solve the burning contemporary problems about the environment. Surely, a legal framework for environmental policy is required for effective action and results; otherwise, solutions will be impossible. Nevertheless, the most important thing is for man to have awareness of his responsibility on a spiritual and practical level and to live a sacramental life, defining his path in the world in absolute harmony with the environment, with self-restraint and with a spirit of self-sacrifice and repentance.

It is true that the world-wide ecological crisis, which often turns into an ecological disaster, is frequently irreversible and that man feels painfully impotent in the face this. As Christians, however, our criterion and ultimate destination is the kingdom to come. We are called to experience something of the future kingdom even now, every day as a foretaste of eternity. So, we do not tremble with the hopeless prognostications of some scientists concerning the future of the planet. Instead, we hold the conviction that God cares for the world providentially; and we preserve our self-consciousness as Christians: a monastery in its location, a priest in his parish, a bishop in his diocese, a layperson in his family or workplace, a government minister in his position of responsibility, a child in his class at school.

In this way, each individual Christian, doing the will of God with consistency and responsibility in his or her everyday activities, can become aware of the sacredness of the world. Our path on earth thus becomes a witness to hope and joy; the things of this world cease to be passing and subject to corruption; they are transfigured into things immortal and eternal. The essence is the love which the saints of our Church live and teach. Love for all things, even for the basest and most insignificant things of this world carry within them the breath of God.

Rev. Daniel Na
Vicar General of the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea