



Christina Nellist

An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Animal Suffering, Intensive Farming and Climate Change

Abstract

I have written this article in response to the recent IPCC report on climate change. This calls for us all to reduce or refrain from eating animal products. It is adapted from a section in my forthcoming book *Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Animal Suffering*, which deals with this issue from a theological and ethical perspective. It includes research on the animal food production industry which apart from causing considerable environmental damage also causes immense suffering to billions of animals. This arises from the commonly held view that animals are resources, units of production or disposable life who do not



Dr. Christina Nellist, Visiting Fellow in the Department of Theology, Religion and Philosophy at the University of Winchester, England.

possess the right to an eternal life with God, rather than individual beings with needs, who are loved by God. I advance the opinion that the leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church have significant roles to play in altering this negative perception of animals and offer several examples of how this may be achieved. It also asks challenging questions on the soteriological implications for humans of animal abuse and exploitation. It concludes that the intensive farming system is incompatible with the tenets of Christianity and ought to be rejected.

Keywords

Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Animal Suffering, Intensive Farming, Climate Change

1 The Living Tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church

Some might argue that the topic covered in this article is outside the sphere of Eastern Orthodox theological or ethical discourse. This is not the case. In his address to Eastern Orthodox Scholars, H. A. H. Bartholomew gives us the authority to tackle such subjects:

Orthodoxy is a faith at once rooted in the past, yet at the same time a Church looking toward the future. It is characterized by a profound sense of continuity with the times and teachings of the Apostolic Church and the Church of the Fathers; but it is also a Church that draws from its rich heritage in order to respond to modern challenges and dilemmas. It is precisely this dual nature that permits Orthodoxy to speak boldly about critical

contemporary issues-precisely because it is a “living tradition.”¹

This article enacts this “living tradition” by examining the challenging contemporary issue of animal food production. This is one issue among many that are important for millions of humans across the globe not only because of the animal suffering involved, but also because of the significant impact upon our environment and human health. An exhaustive investigation of the subject is not possible here, as it would require its own monograph. I have tried instead to balance the need for facts and realism rather than platitudes, whilst limiting the material used and being mindful of the need to be compassionate to the reader. The discussion specifically examines the practical implications and animal suffering involved in our choice of food, together with the soteriological implications.

2 An Inconvenient Truth-Sacrifice and Spiritual Revolution

The continuing challenge before us all is how we are to apply both ancient and contemporary teachings on compassionate care for “all things” in the creation and extending our understanding of community, justice, mercy and rights, to the animals within this system.² Eastern Orthodox theologians have repeat-

¹ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Scholars.” Meeting at the Phanar, 5th January 2016. Available at: <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/address-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-to-the-scholars-meeting-at-the-phanar-january-5-2016->

² His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Justice: Environmental and Human” composed as “Foreword” to proceedings of the

edly called for humanity to change its ethos from one based upon a theory of continual consumption, to one with a Eucharistic and aesthetic ethos of love, virtue, sacrifice, abstinence and purification of sin.³ In essence, they remind us of patristic teachings to restrict and control our desires. H. A. H. Bartholomew confirms Orthodox teaching on the damaging and continuing mind-set of domination rather than loving dominion:

Unfortunately, humanity has lost the liturgical relationship between the Creator God and the creation; instead of priests and stewards, human beings have been reduced to tyrants and abusers of nature.⁴

His use of the word 'nature' indicates that his teaching incorporates animals and corroborates the argument that the abuse and exploitation of animals has negative consequences not only for the abused animals in the form of physical pain, suffering and psychological fear but also negative soteriological implications for humankind. I submit that in addition to those who perpetrate acts of cruelty and exploitation, those who know of such acts but are indifferent to them and those who know but shy away from trying in some way to alleviate the abuse, are in a sense giving tacit approval to that process and are accessories after the fact.⁵ He states that for Orthodox Christians this ascet-

fourth summer seminar at Halki in June (1997), in J. Chryssavgis, (ed.) *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009) p. 173; also, "Environmental Rights," in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 260.

³ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Message of His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew for the day of prayer for the protection of the Environment," 1st Sept 2015. Available at: <http://www.ec-patr.org>.

⁴ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "The Orthodox Church and the Environment," in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 364.

⁵ A useful analogy here is the judgement and guilt of those who accept stolen goods.

ic ethos “is not negation, but a reasonable and tempered use of the world.”⁶ He also draws our attention to the inconvenient truth of the missing dimension and need for sacrifice:

This need for an ascetic spirit can be summed up in a single key word: sacrifice. This is the missing dimension of our environmental ethos and ecological action.⁷

He clarifies this point with teachings on self-limitation in consumption and interprets self-restraint in terms of love, humility, self-control, simplicity and social justice, all of which are essential teachings for our choice of diet and the products we choose to purchase.⁸ Crucially, he acknowledges the fundamental problem of inaction and the difficulties in effecting change:

We are all painfully aware of the fundamental obstacle that confronts us in our work for the environment. It is precisely this: how to move from the theory to action, from word to deeds.⁹

For this spiritual revolution to occur, we must experience radical metanoia, a conversion of attitudes, habits and practices, for ways that we have misused or abused God’s Word, God’s gifts, and God’s creation.¹⁰

⁶ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “A Rich Heritage,” in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 189.

⁷ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “The Ascetic Corrective,” in *Cosmic Grace*, pp. 295-9; also, “Sacrifice: The Missing Dimension,” p. 275.

⁸ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “The Ascetic Corrective,” in *Cosmic Grace*, pp. 295-299; see also, J. Chryssavgis (ed.) *Speaking the Truth in Love: Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, (NY: Fordham University Press, 2011) pp. 89-91, 352-3.

⁹ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Sacrifice: The Missing Dimension,” in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 275.

¹⁰ His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Address before the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly,” in *Speaking the Truth*, p. 283; also, G. Limouris, (ed.) *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*. (Geneva: WCC, 1990) pp. 11-12; St Cyril of Jeru-

These are profound teachings and reminiscent of the warnings from the prophets of old. This spiritual revolution is also required for a conversion in the way we view animals and thus the way we treat them.

Many of his teachings urge us to reflect the asceticism of the early Fathers and the urgent need for changes in human behaviour. In our greed and lust for ever increasing profit, we “violently and cunningly subordinate and exploit creation.” This not only destroys creation but also “undermines the foundations and conditions necessary for the survival of future generations.”¹¹

This aligns with Metropolitan Kallistos’s comment on “evil profit” and St. Irenaeus’s teaching that we must not use our freedom as a “cloak of maliciousness.”¹² It also hints at the environmental crisis, which is beginning to evidence the devastating results of our continued abuse and misuse of animals. Our inability to move from theory to practice indicates that our weaknesses make it difficult for us to attain the Christian ideals.¹³

salem, *The Catechetical Homilies of St Cyril Archbishop of Jerusalem*. D. M. Kalogeraki (ed.) (Orthodox Missionary Fraternity of Thessaloniki, 2011) Homily 2:5.

- 11 His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Foretaste of the Resurrection,” in *Speaking the Truth*, p. 41; also, “Creator and Creation,” in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 176. For similar sentiments, see Dimitrios 1, Ecumenical Patriarch, “Message on Environmental Protection Day” 1989. Available at: <http://www.ec-patr.org>.
- 12 St. Irenaeus, *Irenaeus: Against Heresies*. (Vols 1-5) (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing’s Rare Reprints, 2004) 4.37.4; 4.16.5. Met. Kallistos’s comment from Ch. 6 of my forthcoming book.
- 13 Bishop Isaias Ch. 7 of my forthcoming book and Limouris, *Justice, Peace*, 23.28.

3 Dietary Choices and Environmental Degradation

Keselopoulos (2001) addresses some of the human and environmental problems associated with the animal-based diet and food industry.¹⁴ He explains that famines in Africa, caused by drought and desertification, are due to the monoculture of commodities to supply food for the animals of the North. The result is:

the cynical phenomenon of reserves of dried milk being sent to dying children in Africa, while their own land, instead of producing traditional foodstuffs for local use, “is made barren by the monoculture of animal foodstuffs destined to feed Europe’s cattle.”¹⁵

This is a crucial point. Our misuse of the land and water in order to meet our ever-increasing desire for animal food products has created an imbalance in the natural world, which results in harm to both humans and animals.¹⁶ One forensic question

¹⁴ Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, (trans.) E. Theokritoff. (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2001)

¹⁵ Ibid: 93

¹⁶ See the latest IPCC report on Climate Change, available at: <http://ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>. Also, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s Report (2006) “Livestock’s Long Shadow: Environmental Issues & Options.”

UNFA Report (2013) “Tackling Climate Change Through Livestock.” European Commission, (2010) “Roadmap for Moving to a Low-Carbon Economy in 2050.” International Food Policy Research Institute, (2009) “Climate Change: Research Impact on Agriculture and Costs of Adaptation.” Organic Centre State of Science Review, “Impacts of Organic Farming on the Efficiency of Energy Use in Agriculture.” The Royal Society, (2010) “Energy and the Food System.”; United Nations Environmental Programme Convention on Biodiversity (2007) “Biodiversity and Climate Change.” World Bank Agriculture & Rural Development Department, Report (2009) “Minding The Stock: Bringing Public Policy to Bear on Livestock Sector Development.” International Panel on Climate Change “Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change.”

arising here is, is it a sin to continue to use this system and its products once we become aware of its devastating effects?

Keselopoulos speaks to the point by explicitly linking our use of animals as food with the practice of aestheticism, compassion and pity for the natural world:

Thus, aestheticism prophetically throws into high relief the prerequisite of compassion and pity for both nature and the beauty of the world. This is what can impede the downward spiral into barbarism that murders the animal kingdom by genetically mutating animals raised for beef or dairy products into freaks of nature and makes the land infertile.¹⁷

Keselopoulos not only illustrates the tension between economic interests and animal suffering, particularly in the animal food production industries, but also that fasting limits the number of deaths. In so doing, he affirms the teachings of H. A. H. Bartholomew and others on greed and evil profits; St. Gregory's teachings on use not misuse¹⁸ and of the need for sacrifice. I condense his comments:

If the motives for all these human activities is insatiable greed and the desire for easy profits, then fasting, as a voluntary self-restriction of human needs, can enable man to free himself, at least to a certain degree, from his desires. He can again discover his pristine character, which is to turn toward God, his neighbour and creation, with a genuinely loving disposition. Abstinence

¹⁷ Keselopoulos, "The Prophetic Charisma in Pastoral Theology: Asceticism, Fasting and the Ecological Crisis," in J. Chryssavgis & B. V. Foltz, (eds.) *Toward An Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature and Creation*. (NY: Fordham University Press, 2013) p. 361.

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Love for the Poor* 1st Homily; see also, S. R. Holman, (trans.) *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: OUP, 2001) p. 198.

from meat, observed by monks all year long limits the amount of death we provoke in our relationship to the world. Abstinence from certain food simultaneously aims at protecting, even for a short period of time animals that in great numbers are so cruelly devoured by man. The spirit of fasting that we are obliged to preserve today throughout our culture requires that we change course in our relationship to nature from a predatory thirst for blood to that state of gratitude, which is the distinctive mark of the Eucharist.”¹⁹

I concur with his analysis, which aligns with the latest scientific research. Metropolitan John provides a similar argument:

Restraint in the consumption of natural resources is a realistic attitude and ways must be found to put a limit to the immense waste of natural materials.²⁰

If this argument is apposite for wastage of ‘resources’, then it is equally apposite for the wastage of animal life. I interpret his use of ‘resource’ as referring to the inanimate creation but as there is once again, room for confusion on its meaning, I remind the reader of the need for greater mindfulness in our choice of language. Despite Metropolitan John’s belief that it would be unrealistic to expect our societies to follow an asceticism that echoes the lives of the saints, many of whom were vegetarian, millions of people choose this non-violent diet. They understand that whilst they as individuals may not be able to change the abusive practices of the animal food industries, they have the freedom to choose the non-violent diet advocated by God and do so out of compassion and mercy for the animals and the

¹⁹ A. G. Keselopoulos, “The Prophetic Charisma,” in *Toward An Ecology of Transfiguration*, pp. 361-2.

²⁰ J. Zizioulas, “A Comment on Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si’*.” Available at: <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/a-comment-on-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si->.

environment. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh indicates that the vegan diet is one to emulate and the tragedy of not doing so:

It is frightening to imagine that Man, who was called to lead every being along the road to transfiguration, to the fullness of life, came to the point that he could no longer ascend to God, and was compelled to obtain his food by the killing of those, which he should have led to perfection. This is where the tragic circle closes. We find ourselves inside this circle. All of us are still incapable of living only for eternal life and according to the word of God, although the saints have in a large measure returned to God's original conception of Man. The saints show us that we can through prayer and spiritual endeavour gradually free ourselves from the need to feed on the flesh of animals, and, becoming more and more assimilated to God, require less and less of it.²¹

This is important recognition from Metropolitan Anthony. He links the eating of animals with a loss of human freedom and our inability to transfigure our fallen lives and ascend to God. Keselopoulos argues that vegan/vegetarianism breaks this circle. The fact that many ascetics were and are vegan/vegetarian ought to remind us of God's original dietary choice and thus the most appropriate dietary path to follow.²² It is important to remember that whilst God gave us the dispensation to eat meat, He does not command or force us to do so; we retain the free-

²¹ Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) *Encounter: Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh*, (trans.) T. Wolff. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005) p. 135. This links to the discussion in my book of Noah's failure to grasp the potential for humankind to re-establish a pre-lapsarian violence-free existence. Met. Anthony was not a vegetarian.

²² H. H. Roberts, informs us of the lives of one hundred and fifty saints who chose this non-violent diet. *Vegetarian Christian Saints; Mystics, Ascetics and Monks*. (USA: Anjeli Press, 2004)

dom to return to God's choice.²³ Perhaps if Metropolitan Anthony had known more about the cruelty involved in animal food production he may also have chosen to become vegan/vegetarian. Metropolitan Kallistos recognizes this possibility:

Methods such as factory farming are rather new and I feel that if more people knew what happened they may well give up eating meat...People who live in towns like me eat the products but don't know too much about the background and I think if I knew more about the background I might feel I might have to become a vegetarian.²⁴

It is interesting to note that he also acknowledges that it is easy to find information available on the web, in reports and research and makes the obvious point:

So perhaps it is more that people do not want to know, rather than not being able to access the information.²⁵

Here we see a trace of Kahneman²⁶ and St. Paul; we know what to do but choose not to act in the right ways. If we as individuals or as leaders of our Church advocated the non-violent diet of vegan/vegetarianism, this would not only reduce the number of animals who suffer but also reduce the many environmental problems associated with animal food production. Our increasing desire to consume animal products has resulted in the breeding of such vast numbers of animals that severe negative

²³ I discuss this at length in Ch. 2 of my book.

²⁴ Quote from Ch. 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

impacts have arisen for our environments. Knight (2013)²⁷ provides us with the following important scientific information:

In 2006, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (Steinfeld et al,) calculated that when measured as carbon dioxide (CO₂), 18 percent of worldwide greenhouse gases (GHGs) – totalling 7.5 billion tons annually, result from the production of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, camels, horses, pigs and poultry.

These emissions result from land-clearing for feed crop production and grazing, from the animals themselves, and from the transportation and processing of animal products. In contrast, all forms of transportation combined were estimated to produce around 13.5 percent of global GHGs.

The GHGs produced by animal production are composed of CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, and ammonia. Steinfeld and colleagues calculated that the livestock sector is responsible for 9 percent of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions—that is, those attributable to human activity—which mostly arise from deforestation caused by the encroachment of feed crops and pastures. Animal production occupies some 30 percent of the Earth's land surface and is increasingly driving deforestation, particularly in Latin America. [Circa] seventy percent of previously forested Amazonian land has now been converted to pastures, with feed crops covering a large part of the remainder.

Animals kept for production emit 37 percent of anthropogenic methane, which has been calculated as exerting seventy-two times the global warming potential (GWP) of CO₂, over a twenty year time frame, mostly from gas-

²⁷ A. Knight, "Animal Agriculture and Climate Change," in A. Linzey, (ed.) *The Global Guide to Animal Protection*, (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013) pp. 254-256.

trointestinal fermentation by ruminants (particularly, cows and sheep). They also emit 65 percent of anthropogenic nitrous oxide with 296 times the GWP of CO₂, the great majority of which is released from manure. They also emit 64 percent of anthropogenic ammonia, which contributes significantly to acid rain and ecosystem acidification.

In 2009 Goodland and Anhang calculated that at least 22 billion tons of CO₂ emissions attributable to animal production were not counted and at least 3 billion tons were misallocated by Steinfeld and colleagues. Uncounted sources included livestock respiration, deforestation and methane underestimates. They concluded that animal production actually accounts for at least 51 percent of worldwide GHGs and probably significantly more. Although the precise figures remain under study, it is nevertheless clear that the GHGs resulting from animal production are one of the largest contributors to modern climate change.

Despite these facts, the impact of the animal-based diet on global warming continues to be underestimated and underreported. Using the argument of self-interest as a motivating factor, we can see how abstinence from an animal-based diet could have immediate beneficial results for our water sources, climate change and thus our future survival. We do not need to wait for world/government agreements in order to effect change.

This partially addresses the human and environmental aspect of this theme but what about the animals, what do we know of their suffering in these industries? If we as individuals or as leaders of our Church are to engage with the theological and ethical implications of animal suffering, we need to acquaint ourselves with the available knowledge not only on the environmental impact of an animal-based diet but also on the suffering involved in the systems used. There is a tremendous

amount of research in this area and here I condense some of that research whilst referencing others:

In order to meet the requirements of industrial production and high-density housing, animals are routinely branded with hot irons, dehorned, debeaked, de-tailed and castrated without any sedation or painkillers (...) piglets have tails cut off and males are castrated by crushing or pulling off their testicles without analgesics, even though these procedures cause “considerable pain” (Broom and Fraser 1997). The same happens to lambs. (...) The price for the mutilation is high for individual animals. Piglets show signs of pain for up to a week afterwards (including trembling, lethargy, vomiting and leg shaking). In lambs, stress hormone levels take a huge leap and they show signs of significant pain for four hours or more. Dairy calves who are dehorned show pain for six or more hours afterwards (Turner 2006). Birds too are mutilated without analgesics; beaks are trimmed and at times inside toes are also cut. After debeaking the animals will experience acute pain for circa two days and chronic pain lasts for up to six weeks (Duncan 2001). As stock numbers are vast, illness and injuries are likely to go undetected and result from high density, lack of space, lack of mental stimulation and physical exhaustion; physical and mental health problems quickly arise (Broom & Fraser 2007). Veal calves are often kept in tiny enclosures and tied down by their necks and quickly succumb to “abnormal behaviour and ill health” (Turner 2006; European Commission 1995). Intensive egg production weakens bones and leads to lameness, osteoporosis and painful fractures as all calcium and minerals are used for eggs causing “both acute and chronic pain” (...) it can also lead to internal haemorrhages, starvation and ultimately death which will be painful and “lingering” (Webster 2004:184). Cows suffer from mastitis and lameness

(Stokka et al, 1997) and kept pregnant to keep milk yields high, (Vernelli 2005; Turner 2006).²⁸

There is no other reason for these practices other than the desire for increased profit; the “evil profit” that Metropolitan Kallistos describes. One question arising here is whether the required “spiritual revolution” should apply to the animals within such industries. If the answer is no, we ought to examine why

²⁸ E. Aaltola, *Animal Suffering: Philosophy and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) pp. 34-45. Aaltola provides many other reports and scientific studies, which outline numerous examples of suffering. D. Broom and A. Fraser, *Farm Animal Behaviour and Welfare*. (NY: CABI Publishing, 1997); J. Turner, *Stop, Look, Listen: Recognising the Sentience of Farm Animals*, (A Report for Compassion in World Farming. 2006); European Commission, 1995, 2001, 2012; I. Duncan, “Animal Welfare Issues in the Poultry Industry: Is There a Lesson to Be Learned,” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 4:3 (2001) pp. 207-21; A. B. Webster, “Welfare Implications of Avian Osteoporosis.” *Poultry Science* 83 (2004), pp. 184-92; G. Stokka, J. Smith and J. Dunham, *Lameness in Dairy Cattle*, (Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, 1997). Available at: <https://www.bookstore.ksre.k-state.edu/Item.aspx?catId=567&pubId=672>; T. Vernelli, *The Dark Side of Dairy-A Report on the UK Dairy Industry*, 2005. Available at: http://milkmyths.org.uk/pdfs/dairy_report.pdf. See also, J. Mench, “Broiler Breeders: Feed Restriction and Welfare.” *World’s Poultry Science Journal* 58 (2002), pp. 23-9; G. Santora, C. Berg and J. Lund, “A Comparison Between Leg Problems in Danish and Swedish Broiler Production.” *Animal Welfare* 12 (2003), pp. 677-83; R. Julain, “Evaluating the Impact of Metabolic disorders on the Welfare of Broilers,” in C. Weeks, and A. Butterworth, (eds.) *Measuring and Auditing Broiler Welfare*, (Wallingford: CABI Publishing, 2004) pp. 51-59; J. Appleby, “Animal Sentience in US Farming,” in J. Turner and J. D’Silva, (eds.) *Animals Ethics and Trade: The Challenge of Animal Sentience*, (London: Earthscan, 2007) pp. 159-165. For other references to misuse and cruelty, see the Compassion in World Farming website: <http://www.ciwf.org>.

we have chosen to exclude billions of animals from receiving compassion, mercy and justice. If we conclude that they are merely for that use, then I believe we are in danger of continuing the mind-set of domination, which in turn, indicates that only human suffering is relevant to God. I submit that this mind-set is against the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church and akin to the type of heresies the early church Fathers fought so hard to overcome.

Having given a small indication of the suffering endured during the rearing of animals, we should also consider their death. Most people no doubt believe that the killing of animals is 'humane' and undertaken close to home. Research provides evidence that even in countries with strict animal welfare laws, many millions are likely to suffer in the process of transportation and slaughter. Live animals are routinely transported by road, rail, sea or air across continents. All animal welfare charities agree that long distance transport causes enormous suffering through overcrowding, exhaustion, dehydration, pain and stress. For example, in the EU, up to 35 million chickens are dead by the time they reach the slaughterhouse.²⁹

Australia exports around four million live sheep every year, mostly to the Middle East. These animals can travel up to fifty hours by road before they start the three weeks journey by sea and a further journey by road in the importing country. It is estimated that tens of thousands of sheep die before reaching their destination.³⁰ Despite the Australian government's implementation of an export supply-chain assurance scheme, investigations by animal welfare groups have documented terri-

²⁹ I. Duncan, (2001) pp. 207-21.

³⁰ See: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2012/09/Live-export-tragedies-continue-as-70000-sheep-suffer>

ble suffering at slaughter after export.³¹ Canada transports farm animals thousands of miles within its borders and to America. The animals experience exceptionally harsh conditions as the climate changes from freezing cold to the scorching sun. The trucks used are often without air conditioning. In India, cattle travel vast areas as only two states are legally allowed to slaughter cows. Animals are often brutally treated and overcrowded during transport, resulting in severe injuries and fatalities. Thousands of animals travel from South America and reared for beef production in Asia and Africa. These journeys often involve the animals spending weeks at sea and result in inhumane slaughter, in addition to the problems of transportation when delays, errors or accidents occur, thousands of animals die in tragic circumstances.³²

The spread of diseases is another worrying factor. Diseases such as bluetongue virus, foot and mouth disease, avian influenza and swine fever can be directly attributable to the live transportation of farm animals. Moving livestock long distances to markets and slaughterhouses can spread infectious diseases between animals around a country. Animals can travel from country to country with few medical checks, which can result in the spread of disease. In 2007, some cattle imported from continental Europe arrived with bluetongue virus because they had

³¹ See: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2012/06/Slaughter-footage-reveals-horrifyingsuffering>.

³² In 2003, the *Corm Express* carried 58,000 sheep from Australia to Saudi Arabia. The sheep remained on board for three months in appalling and deteriorating conditions resulting in over 5,000 deaths. Fire, delays or sinking of livestock ships result in the suffering and death of large numbers of animals. In December 2009, more than 17,000 cattle and 10,500 sheep drowned when the ship transporting them from Uruguay to Syria capsized in a storm off the coast of Tripoli, with the loss of the Captain and several crew.

not been tested before their journeys began. The suffering often does not end when the journey is over. Duncan informs us that:

Of all the things we do to our animals on the farm the things we do to them in the 24 hours before they are slaughtered reduce their welfare the most.³³

In many countries animals are brutally loaded, unloaded and moved using electric goads, sticks, ropes, chains and sharp objects. Standards of slaughter vary. Some animals are inadequately stunned or not stunned at all before slaughter:

Birds such as broiler chickens and turkeys are pulled and dragged by their feet and shoved into crates with great haste (up to thousands per hour). Dislocations and broken bones are common, as are internal injuries and death. Due to problems with stunning, birds face greater risk of missing the stunning machine and of entering the scalding tank alive and conscious.³⁴

Bleeding techniques can be poor, which means the pigs may regain consciousness whilst hanging upside down from the slaughter line shackles with a puncture wound in their chest. These animals will desperately try to right themselves, unable to comprehend what is happening to them (Grandin 2003).³⁵

³³ Duncan, (2001) p. 216.

³⁴ Duncan, (2001) p. 211, also pp. 11, 13. See also N. G. Gregory and L. J. Wilkins, "Broken Bones in Domestic Fowl: Handling and Processing Damage in End-of-Lay Battery Hens" *British Poultry Science* 30 (1989), pp. 555-562; C. Weeks & C. Nicol, "Poultry Handling and Transport" in *Livestock Handling and Transport* (Wallingford: CABI Publishing, 2000); A. B. Webster, "Welfare Implications of Avian Osteoporosis" *Poultry Science* 83 (2004), pp. 184-92.

³⁵ See: <http://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2013/05/illegal-slaughter-of-animals-in-cyprus/>; <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/tag/slaughter>. Those who follow Judaism and Islam still slaughter animals in the biblical tradition. A recent undercover investigation highlights the inhumane actions and immense suffering of animals,

Fish placed on ice take up to 15 minutes to lose consciousness, eventually dying through suffocation, and means that fish may be conscious when their gills are cut off.³⁶

Gross informs us that pigs are not the only animals to regain consciousness during the slaughter process.³⁷ When we become aware of the harmful realities of consuming animal food products, we understand why Metropolitan Kallistos describes his experience of intensive farming as unchristian and the financial gains as “evil profit.”³⁸

One question that begs asking here is where is the compassion, justice, mercy and inclusion into our community called for by the Ecumenical Patriarch, for the animals used in these systems?

Having previously outlined in my book, an Eastern Orthodox theory of love and compassion to all creatures we must also ask if we are to apply it to animals in the food production industry. Again, if the answer is no, we ought to examine why we have chosen to exclude billions of animals from inclusion in our spiritual revolution. If the answer is yes, we have the challenge of how we are to apply teachings on extending our community, justice and rights to the animals within these systems. This will

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5456263/Men-chanted-tribalstyle-dance-killed-sheep-spared-jail.html>.

³⁶ P. Lymbery, “In Too Deep: The Welfare of Intensively Farmed Fish,” available at: http://www.eurocbc.org/fz_lymbery.pdf.

³⁷ Cows also regain consciousness. Lecture notes, Winchester 2016.

³⁸ His arguments are equally relevant to other problem areas such as vivisection and animal testing; the wearing of fur; aspects of the pet and zoo trade and the killing of animals for fun in the promotion of ‘sport’ and ‘recreational’ hunting. See also E. Marcus, *Meat Market: Animals, Ethics and Money* (Boston: Brio Press, 2005).

not be easy, for those who use such practices or consume its products need to accept that changes are necessary.

In the context of this part of the discussion, there appear to be only two solutions: a) the animal food production industries stop reproducing vast numbers of animals. b) Consumers reduce or refrain from animal products, thus reducing the demand, the number of animals reared, the environmental damage they cause and the overall suffering incurred. The first seems unlikely since the industry meets the demands of the consumer and makes huge profits in the process. The solution therefore, appears to lie with the consumer. This is where the leaders of our Church can play a significant role. If individuals were encouraged to refrain or reduce their consumption of animal-based food products this would be both an effective and immediate way of decreasing the demand, the animal suffering involved and the damage to the environment and human health. Basing the argument upon the likelihood that people will choose self-interest over altruism, Christians may be more accepting of this teaching if they knew of the health problems associated with an animal-based diet. Whilst this information is usually available via the health professions and the media there is also an important role for the Church. Patristic teachings evidence the destruction of God's creation because of human passions³⁹ and one frequent example is the self-centred love of gluttony. St. Gregory offers guidance:

Use, do not misuse. (...) 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

³⁹ St. J. Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, (trans.) G. G. Christo. (The Fathers of the Church Vol 96, Washington: DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) 10.5, 130.

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.⁴⁰

A question arising here is if gluttony is a sin, is the killing of animals to feed this gluttony also a sin? St. Gregory's use of negative language to describe the process: pillages, eradicates, artful hedonists, may indicate that this is so. Whilst St. John Chrysostom does not identify the food in the following, he does acknowledge the link between food and ill health:

Don't you daily observe thousands of disorders stemming from laden tables and immoderate eating?⁴¹

Russell (1980) informs us that:

The control of the appetite was never over; it is instructive that it is gluttony as much as sexuality which was their continuous field of battle.⁴²

Many people are ignorant of the detrimental health effects of consuming animal products. This, in part, is due to the vast sums of money used to market animal products as healthy, yet when we examine the research into diet and ill health we see a direct correlation between adopting the animal-based diets in developing countries with an increase in Western health problems, which includes obesity. In the UK, obesity has more than trebled in the last 25 years with nearly a third of adults and a fourth of children diagnosed as obese. Health experts believe that obesity is linked to a wide range of health problems, including some cancers ; diabetes; heart disease; high blood pres-

⁴⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Love for the Poor*, in *The Hungry are Dying*, p. 198.

⁴¹ St. J. Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, 10.5, 130.

⁴² N. Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, (Oxford. Mowbray & Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981) p. 37.

sure; arthritis; infertility; indigestion; gallstones; stress, anxiety, depression; snoring and sleep apnoea.⁴³

Consuming animal products is the norm for many cultures and despite numerous health warnings associated with animal food products, vast numbers of people continue to eat themselves into ill-health. Again, we see the importance of Kahneman's work. Attitudes to diet will not be easy to change without education. Certainly, such education should be ongoing in schools and colleges, however this is another area where the leaders of the Church can play a significant role.

Moving to the soteriological implications of our actions H. A. H. Bartholomew offers some clarity. He begins with listing environmental calamities such as nuclear explosions, radioactive waste, toxic rain and polluting oil-spills then unusually, he adds a form of animal abuse to the list:

We may also think of the force-feeding of animals so that they will provide more food for us. All this constitutes an insolent overthrow of natural order.⁴⁴

This is a rare and essential teaching for the animal food production aspect of animal suffering. His acknowledgement of the violence and inhumane production processes involved is clear recognition that force-feeding animals is an example of the exploitation of 'nature'. His language reminds us of St Gregory's negative language in his teaching on "Use; do not misuse!" He

⁴³ See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295149/07-1662-obesity-modelling-trends.pdf. See also, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/21702372>.

⁴⁴ "Message by H. A. H. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew upon the Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation," 1st September 2001, in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 56. An example here would be the results of gavage feeding ducks/geese for Foie Gras: liver dysfunction, over expansion of the abdomen, walking problems, scarring of the oesophagus and death.

also acknowledges the ill effects of the insolent overthrowing of the natural order to human health:

Indeed, it is becoming generally accepted that the disruption of the natural order has negative effects on the health and well-being of human beings, such as the contemporary plagues of humanity, cancer, the syndrome of post virus fatigue, heart diseases, anxieties and a multitude of other diseases.⁴⁵

His acknowledgement of the link between exploitative food production practices and harm to animal and human health is also critically important, for it highlights the interconnectedness of the created world. The question arising here is whether he has identified these processes as sins? A related and equally challenging moral and ethical question is whether it is right to kill innocent animals in medical research to treat disorders that have arisen from this form of human self-indulgence? H. A. H. Bartholomew's teaching on humanity's exploitation of nature in "greedy and unnatural ways" may help us to answer that question. I argue that these practices indicate not only the desire for evil profit but also continuing human arrogance and the sinful misuse of our freedom.

The teaching on the overthrowing of the natural order is equally applicable to another aspect of animal suffering, i.e. their loss of freedom. Animals kept in pens or cages are restricted in both their movements and natural behaviours. Examples would include gestation and veal crates; 'battery' and crush-cages; small cages or enclosures for animals with fur, or wild animals kept for human curiosity and entertainment. Keeping animals in these conditions causes physiological and psychological distress and ill-health. It seems reasonable therefore to include his

⁴⁵ *Cosmic Grace*, p. 56.

specific example of force-feeding animals and my additions to it, as further examples of sins against animals.

H. A. H. Bartholomew also speaks to the point on the negative soteriological implications for those who by their inaction and/or use of the products are part of the problem:

We all share the responsibility for such tragedies, since we tolerate those immediately responsible for them and accept a portion of the fruit that results from such an abuse of nature.⁴⁶

In applying his teaching to our theme, I can state that whilst we may not be killing or rearing the animals in inhumane ways, by our demand for animal food products we are part of the reason why such practices and processes exist. Essentially, we create the demand and the market. The challenge before us remains.

4 A Role for the Church

Eastern Orthodoxy teaches on the need for a spiritual revolution and on the extension of justice, rights, mercy, compassion, nonviolence and inclusion of nature into our community. We are also to be a 'voice for the 'voiceless', which indicates that we ought to act in ways that reduce animal suffering. What then are we as Eastern Orthodox Christians and Church to say when we learn of the animal suffering involved in both the rearing and death of animals within these systems? Limouris speaks to the point when linking our Christian duty to identify injustices, which brings us back to personal sacrifice:

⁴⁶ The analogy to the acceptance of stolen goods makes the point. "Message by H. A. H. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew upon the Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation," 1st September 2001, in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 57.

Christian men and women must also have the courage to spell out the injustices, which they see, even though this might require them to make personal sacrifices. These sacrifices will include costly involvement and action.⁴⁷

We must repent for the abuses which we have imposed upon the natural world. (...) We must work and lobby in every way possible. (...) For ourselves, this means a recommitment to the simple life which is content with necessities and (...) a new affirmation of self-discipline, a renewal of the spirit of asceticism.⁴⁸

Words, however—even changed attitudes—will no longer suffice. Wherever we find ourselves, as Christians we need to act in order to restore the integrity of creation. A creative, cooperative, active and determined plan of action is required for implementation.⁴⁹

If it is our individual Christian duty to identify injustices and act to prevent them, it seems reasonable to conclude that it ought to be the responsibility of the leaders of the Church. What then are the possibilities for us as individuals and leaders of our Church? Changing the attitudes of those who run these industrial processes will be difficult if not impossible without intervention from outside. This is one area where the leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church could play a significant role just as they have done in their engagement with environmental issues. Examples here are H. A. H. Bartholomew's Religion and Science environmental symposiums; his visit to the World Economic Forum at Davos and his recent coordinated action with Pope Francis where each convened business, scientific, and academic leaders in Rome and Athens respectively, to hasten the transi-

⁴⁷ A. Limouris, *Justice, Peace*, p. 24, no. 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 12, no 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 12, no 38.

tion from fossil fuels to safe renewable energy.⁵⁰ It is also possible therefore, to have this type of coordinated action for discussions on the environmental impact of an animal-based diet. In my forthcoming book we learn that those in authority are beginning to define cruelty, abuse and exploitation of animals within the animal food industries as a sin and an abuse of human freedom. We also have the following teaching from Abbot Khalil:

Christians need to avoid eating meat wherever possible out of mercy for the animals and care for creation.⁵¹

In my work, I have repeatedly argued that abstinence from animal food products is a crucial element of effectively reducing animal suffering, environmental degradation and global warming. In defining the sin of exploitation and abuse in contemporary animal food production practices, the leaders of our Church would also be reaffirming Christ's teaching in Luke 14:5 and the early Church tradition that we should act to prevent the suffering of God's non-human beings. I argue that it will also be effective in moving our spiritual journey towards the likeness of an all-loving and compassionate God.

I am encouraged that those with authority urge us to be a voice for the voiceless and I am encouraged that the Eastern Orthodox environmental debate urges actions rather than words. This process has begun via Eastern Orthodox discussions on environmental issues and I respectfully submit that these discussions must now extend into the areas of animal suffering

⁵⁰ For an interesting commentary see "Energy for the Common Good." https://www.project_syndicate.org/commentary/climate-change-pope-ecumenicalpatriarch-by-jeffrey-d-sachs-2018-06.

⁵¹ Private conversation 15th April 2018. Used with permission. Fr. Khalil is Abbot of Balamand Monastery and teaches at Balamand University, Lebanon.

that arise from the same mind-set of domination over the natural world. I am also encouraged by teachings on the negative soteriological implications for those who inflict abuse, those who are indifferent to it and those who know, are concerned, but do not act to reduce the suffering. I repeat H. A. H. Bartholomew's important teaching on the need for action:

We are all painfully aware of the fundamental obstacle that confronts us in our work for the environment. It is precisely this: how to move from the theory to action, from word to deeds.⁵²

Part of this process requires us to be mindful of our language. If we continually refer to animals as 'the environment', 'nature' or 'resources', it is unlikely that we will ever view them as part of our community, worthy of justice, rights and mercy and, unlikely to consider them as worthy of our love and compassion. Let us instead, begin to refer to them as animals or better still cows, sheep, chickens, etc., so that we facilitate the process of seeing them as individual beings loved by God, rather than as units of production or disposable life.

Our continuing walk to the abyss indicates that we as individuals have not sufficiently understood Eastern Orthodox teachings and the leaders of our Church and our academics must address this failure. Part of this process will be to ensure that our priests and laity understand the Eastern Orthodox teachings related to animal suffering. For this to occur we need our leaders to engage with the subject. It has, apparently, been difficult for Christian Church leaders to advocate a vegan/vegetarian diet. This form of diet is almost the equivalent of a permanent strict fast, which requires daily sacrifice. The concept of sacrifice is alien to many in contemporary societies

⁵² His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Sacrifice: The Missing Dimension," in *Cosmic Grace*, p. 275.

but this is precisely where the leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church have a vital role to play. Eastern Orthodoxy has the ascetic tradition and thus the authority to promote this diet, unlike other Christian faiths, secular ethicists or environmentalists.

In order to facilitate this possibility, I end my discussion on the animal food industry by presenting some practical proposals:

Our leaders could urge Orthodox Christians to give up animal-food based diets entirely or, as a first step, abstain from foods produced in intensive farming practices. In so doing, the impact on animal suffering, human health and environmental damage would be enormous. If our Patriarchs and Bishops were to declare their intention not to consume or provide animal products at their meetings this would send a strong message to both clergy and laity.

Our leaders could affirm the sin of inflicting harm upon God's animal creation in order to achieve ever-increasing profits.

An essential part of this process requires educating our priests on the many problems associated with the animal food production industries. Seminary modules can be adapted from the module outlined in Appendix B of my forthcoming book. Training would enable our priests to teach a coherent message that will result in the reduction of animal suffering, improvements in our health and the environment and in advancing our spiritual journeys.⁵³

As a way of further facilitating the above, the Pan-Orthodox Concern for Animals charity is working in an ecumenical context, to produce an ethical framework to guide the policy and

⁵³ See www.ciwf.org.uk for details on the misuse of antibiotics in farming and the link with antibiotic resistance in humans.

practice of Churches and other Christian institutions, about farmed animal welfare.⁵⁴ This initiative aims to develop resources and work with institutions to support the development and implementation of policy in this area.⁵⁵ The endorsement of Eastern Orthodox Church involvement in such initiatives will send a clear message to the manufacturers that it is time to change their practices.

Finally, to be clear, I do not state that all those working within this industry are cruel or evil people, though there are many recorded instances of people exhibiting such tendencies. What I do say, is that the system itself is a form of legalized violence to animals which is contributing to climate change, thus repeating the scenario that the early church Fathers frequently warned us about. It is incompatible with ancient and contemporary teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church and ought therefore, to be rejected.

⁵⁴ See panorthodoxconcernforanimals.org. I am a founder member and editor of this group which has Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia and Bishop Isaías of Tamasou and Orinis as our patrons.

⁵⁵ This is an initiative by D. Clough, Professor of Theological Ethics in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Chester, UK.