



# RIVER OUT OF EDEN: WATER, ECOLOGY, AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

ECOPEACE / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MIDDLE EAST (FOEME)  
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And he said to me, 'Son of man, have you seen this?'  
Then he led me back to the bank of the river.

Ezekiel 47:6

## COVENANT FOR THE JORDAN RIVER

We recognize that the Jordan River Valley is a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forms a sanctuary for wild plants and animals, and has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history. The first people ever to leave Africa walked through this valley and drank from its springs. Farming developed on these plains, and in Jericho we see the origins of urban civilization itself. Not least, the river runs through the heart of our spiritual traditions: some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks and the valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity. By any measure, this landscape must be counted as part of the heritage of humankind.

But over the past 50 years, the Lower Jordan River has been destroyed. 96% of its historic flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and effluent, including untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost. This is not just a tragedy for wildlife: families have seen their fields turn to dust, not from a lack of water but from the injustice of its distribution. The demise of the Jordan and the collapse of the valley's eco-system represents a failure of our most basic responsibility towards the species whose habitats have been destroyed and the ecological systems that sustain life on earth. It is a neglect that leaves us impoverished, that cripples the growth of an economy

based on tourism, and that exacerbates the political conflicts that divide this region. It also exemplifies a wider failure to serve as custodians of the planet: if we cannot protect a place of such exceptional value, what part of the earth will we hand on intact to our children?

We have a different vision of this valley: a vision in which a clean, living river flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share the valley and the people who live here.

Realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. We therefore call upon the governments of the countries that share this watershed to make a serious commitment of resources and political capital to the rehabilitation of the Jordan River. As individuals and organizations, as members of civil society, and as religious or community leaders, we also affirm that this is a landscape of universal ecological, cultural, and spiritual importance, and commit to work towards the vision expressed in this covenant.

Dear Friends,

This is a toolkit of information to help Christian communities around the world learn about the condition of the Jordan River and join in efforts to rehabilitate the once mighty Jordan.

The first section describes the demise of the Jordan River, what went wrong, and why it matters. The second section provides a compilation of writings about the place of the Jordan River in the Christian tradition, the sacredness of water, and the connection between spiritual faith and care for the natural world. Two essays about the state of the river and the role of the Christian community in its rehabilitation have been commissioned for the sourcebook. You will also find sacred texts, prayers, songs, poems, and essays. You are welcome to use these works as the basis for your own presentations or sermons or to adapt them to suit your audience.

Section three includes sample lesson plans and questions to assist educators in designing programs for a wide range of age groups. The final pages contain suggestions for how your community can support regional efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River. We hope that you will urge decision makers to join in the revitalization of the Jordan. Additional resources to support awareness campaigns and plan visits to the river are available at [www.SavetheJordan.com](http://www.SavetheJordan.com).

Please treat this as a working document: annotate it, select what is most illuminating, and enrich it through your own knowledge and insight. We hope that these materials inspire your congregation or class to join in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

Thank you for participating in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

With gratitude,  
EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East  
June 2014

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Covenant for the Jordan River	3
<b>I. BACKGROUND</b>	<b>11</b>
The Garden of the Lord	13
An Ecosystem Destroyed	16
The Destruction of the Jordan Some Facts and Figures	17
A Failure of Wisdom	18
A New Vision of the Valley	20
A Measure of Progress	21
Justice, Peace, Prosperity	22
Reviving the Jordan	23
<b>II. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION</b>	<b>25</b>
The Blessing of Water: A Sermon on the Jordan River	26
Father Gregory Collins	
Abbot of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem	
The Sacredness Of Water	29
An Orthodox Christian Reflection On Creation Care	
Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Throne	
The Jordan River and the Natural World in the Old Testament	32

The Jordan River in the Gospels	34
Prayers, Poems, and Other Writings	35
Hymns & Songs	38
Times and Seasons	42
Other Reflections & Insights	44
Non-Ecclesiastical Writings Urging Care for Creation	
Christian Declarations and Essays on Ecology	47
The Christian Declaration on Nature Father Lanfranco Serrini	
To Commit a Crime Against the Natural World Is a Sin	50
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople	
Other Christian Statements on Ecology	53
Troubling Waters: The Jordan River Between Religious Imagination and Environmental Degradation	54
III. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES	55
Saving the Jordan, Saving Ourselves	56
IV. IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION	63
V. CREDITS	67



## I. BACKGROUND

The Jordan River has suffered an ecological collapse. What went wrong and why does it matter.



## THE GARDEN OF THE LORD

For Christians, the Jordan is a symbol of purity. Christ's baptism in the river marks His revelation as the Son of God and the beginning of His ministry on earth. This is a river that flows through the heart of our spiritual tradition.

Today, the river has been all but destroyed. 96% of its flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost.

This is a man-made disaster – one that shows an utter disregard for the natural world, for our Christian heritage, and for our responsibility as custodians of God's earth.

It's not too late. EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) asks you to join us in calling for a return of water to this river, and a return of life to the Jordan Valley.



## A SOURCE OF LIFE

Imagine the River Jordan.

For Christians, the name calls up an image that has been painted a thousand times: Jesus standing in the water, his head bowed in prayer, while John pours the water of baptism over Him. As Matthew tells us –

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” Matthew 3:16-17

The river in which this baptism takes place is, in the Christian imagination, a mighty river – a river that, according to the book of Joshua, “overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest” (Joshua 3:15).

Even more importantly, the river is clean. Baptism is primarily a ritual of cleansing and renewal. This is what has made the Jordan’s

water into the very symbol of purity. In our myth and memory, then, this is a river of miracles. A river of life.

## A BLESSED LAND

Until about 50 years ago, the river looked much as it did in the time of John and Jesus. From its source in the foothills of Mount Hermon / Jabel Al- Sheikh the Jordan rushed south into the Sea of Galilee, and then meandered more slowly along the length of the Jordan Valley until it disappeared into the intensely saline lake of the Dead Sea – the lowest point on the surface of the earth.

All along the way, the Jordan River brought life to the valley. It created wetland habitats in which wild plants and animals flourished. It greened a corridor through the desert, connecting the eco-systems of Eastern Africa and Western Asia and forming a flyway used by some 500 million migratory birds each year. And it allowed the flourishing of human life and the emergence of urban civilization.

Some of the first people ever to leave Africa walked across this plain and drank from its springs. And it was here, too, that the first farmers began to plant and harvest grain in the alluvial mud north of the Dead Sea. Agriculture was the breakthrough that allowed villages to develop into the world’s first towns, Jericho among them. Jericho’s walls were built some 10,000 years ago, and it can claim to be the oldest continuously inhabited city anywhere in the world.

## RIVER OF MIRACLES

The river also runs through the heart of the Christian spiritual tradition.

The earliest mention of the Jordan Valley comes in the book of Genesis, where the plain is described as “well watered everywhere...even as the garden of the Lord...” (Genesis 13:10).

Later, in the book of Joshua, an image of the river as a place of transcendence begins to emerge. The Jordan becomes a kind of divine

“By any measure – ecological, cultural, spiritual - this river must be counted as part of the heritage of all humankind, and as a place of exceptional importance to Christians”

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threshold that separates this world from the paradise beyond. When Joshua leads his people across the river, its waters dry up to allow them to pass over into freedom. It is here on the banks of the Jordan that the Prophet Elias ascends to heaven in a whirlwind, and that the mantle of prophethood passes to his successor, Elisha. And here, too, in a story that has long been seen as a pre-figuration of the Baptism, Naaman the Leper is healed by bathing in the waters of the Jordan.

The Jordan was part of the landscape that Jesus knew, and all of these stories would have been familiar to Him. The Gospel tradition draws on this image of the Jordan as a meeting place between heaven and earth. Through the story of Christ’s baptism, it is an image that has carried over into the painting, poetry, and song of half the world.

By any measure, then – ecological, cultural, spiritual - this river must be counted as part of the heritage of all humankind, and as a place of exceptional importance to Christians.





## AN ECOSYSTEM DESTROYED

Neither the natural beauty nor the spiritual significance of the Jordan has been enough to save the river from being degraded.

In just over 50 years, the countries that share this watershed have dammed and diverted more than 96% of the river's historic flow. What little water remains is polluted with saline, sewage, and agricultural run-off. In places - including the site at which John baptized Jesus - the river is not much more than a stagnant canal of effluent.

As the river has dried up, the Jordan Valley has suffered an ecological collapse. Half the valley's biodiversity has been lost. The Dead Sea, sustained only by inflowing water from the Jordan, is sinking by more than a meter every year.

This is not just a tragedy for wildlife. Springs that irrigated farmland for thousands of years have started to falter and fail. Wells used for generations have run dry. Refused access to

the river and denied a fair share of the water pumped from beneath the land, Palestinian communities have seen fields turn to dust, livelihoods lost, and families forced to migrate.

The neglect of this river shows a disregard for our own spiritual heritage, as well as a failure to meet our moral responsibilities as custodians of God's earth. It also exacts a heavy price from the nations that share the valley, crippling the growth of an economy that could be supported by tourism and exacerbating the political conflicts that divide the region. This is an ecological collapse whose severity and cost - economic, ecological, human - we are only now beginning to count.

"The neglect of this river cripples the growth of an economy that could be supported by tourism and exacerbates the political



## conflicts that divide the region" THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JORDAN SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Lower Jordan River begins at the Sea of Galilee (also known as Lake Tiberius or Lake Kinneret) and flows south for about 120km before reaching its end at the Dead Sea.
- The Lower Jordan Valley is divided between Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Palestinians have no access to the Jordan and do not receive water directly from the river.
- Until about 1950, some 1.3 billion cubic meters of water flowed through the valley every year.
- 96% of that flow has been diverted.
- Untreated or poorly treated sewage has been dumped or allowed to leak into the river for over 50 years from Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian communities.
- The diversion and pollution of this water has caused an ecological collapse - more than 50% of the valley's biodiversity has been lost.
- The dying of the Jordan is also causing the Dead Sea to disappear - it is now sinking at the rate of approximately one meter per year.
- FoEME estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river's average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take the rest.



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“...man’s dominion cannot be understood as license to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures... At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God’s bountiful treasures.”

**Father Lanfranco Serrini**

**A FAILURE OF WISDOM**

Why has this happened? How have we allowed this to happen to a place of such exceptional beauty and value?

At the root of the problem is conflict. The basin that drains into the Jordan River is divided between Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Instead of seeing the valley as a single, trans-boundary watershed, these nations have raced to capture the greatest possible share of the Jordan’s water. FoEME estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river’s average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take about a quarter each. Palestinians, denied access to the river, take almost nothing.

Given the intensity of conflict in the region, this zero-sum struggle for the valley’s water might seem inevitable. But it is, in the long term, an approach that will undermine the interests of all concerned. This is a single watershed: the flow of its streams does not correspond to the borders drawn on our maps, and its rain and

...rivers cannot be sustainably managed through a process of competition.

The demise of this valley also reveals a profound lack of respect for the natural and non-human world. It exemplifies an attitude in which nature, including its water and all its forms of life, is seen as nothing more than a collection of resources to be mined for human use.

This is surely not what was meant when God gave man dominion over the earth. As Father Lanfranco Serrini, the leader of the Franciscan friars at the time of the Assisi declarations on nature, has written -

“...man’s dominion cannot be understood as license to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures...At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God’s bountiful treasures.”

On the contrary, our special place in God’s

creation carries with it a responsibility to cherish this earth. In the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I -

We are called to be stewards, and reflections of God’s love by example. Therefore, we proclaim the sanctity of all life, the entire creation being God’s and reflecting His continuing will that life abound...For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands, for humans to injure other humans with disease, for humans to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances— these are sins.”

The lack of a sense of wonder, the loss of reverence for life, the abandonment of our responsibility as custodians – all this has contributed to the demise of the Jordan. The revival of the river, then, requires not just a shift in policy, but a renewed spiritual effort to honor the creation that God has entrusted to us.





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## A NEW VISION OF THE VALLEY

FoEME has a different vision for the Jordan Valley - a vision in which a clean, living river runs from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants, birds and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share this valley and amongst the people who live here.

This is a vision that reflects the image of the valley that we see in the Gospels. A vision that honors our heritage and that expresses reverence for God's creation.

Given the scarcity of water in parts of this region and the state of relations between the countries that share the valley, realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. To do nothing is to leave a landscape irreparably damaged by our own neglect.

The starting point of any new approach must be to see this river and its tributaries as a single, interconnected ecosystem. If we want the Jordan to survive – if we want to use this water to sustain farms and families and economies – we have no choice but to manage it sustainably through cross-border cooperation.

*“If we want the Jordan to survive, we have no choice but to manage it sustainably through cooperation.”*



© Ofer Stein

## A MEASURE OF PROGRESS

In the last three years we have seen the first signs of progress in the effort to revive the river.

Responding to years of advocacy, national governments and municipalities are now working to prevent the dumping or leaking of untreated sewage into the river. New treatment plants are in development in Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian communities throughout the Jordan Valley. FoEME is confident that half a century of using the Jordan as a sewage canal could soon come to an end.

2013 also saw the first release of clean water into the Jordan River in 49 years. The Israeli Water Authority has agreed to allocate 30mcm (million cubic meters) of fresh water every year from the Sea of Galilee to help revive the river. This sets an important precedent for future allocations, but it falls far short of FoEME's recommendation that a third of the historic flow be returned as part of an international effort to rehabilitate the Jordan.

FoEME is also developing the first cross-border master plan for the management of the Jordan River Valley – a plan that takes account of the valley's fragile ecology as well as recognizing the legitimate human need to draw on its water resources. The plan puts scientifically sound and economically realistic policy recommendations behind our vision for the Jordan. Key recommendations include the return of 400-600 mcm (million cubic meters) of fresh water to the river; an end to the dumping of raw or poorly-treated sewage, saline, and other effluents into the stream; and the establishment of functioning international mechanisms for the joint management of the valley's water.

With the support of national governments, this master plan can become the blueprint for the revival of the river.



## JUSTICE, PEACE, PROSPERITY

We believe the Jordan can be revived without weakening the valley's agricultural economy or causing a shortage of water for human use. In the countries that share the valley, FoEME has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved (see the fact box page 18) and used to restore basic water rights to the Palestinians, to revive the Lower Jordan River, and to save the Dead Sea.

In the past decade FoEME has opened eco-parks – ideal places to stay and learn - on both sides of the Jordan. We are now working towards the creation of a trans-boundary ecological peace park centered on one of the river's historic crossing points, on the border between Israel and Jordan. The peace park will welcome visitors from both sides of the valley, providing a much-needed point of access to a river that, for much of its length, remains a closed military zone.

“FoEME believes that a living Jordan River can bring economic prosperity as well as ecological health to this valley, and that the management of the valley's water provides a practical opportunity for regional cooperation and the advancement of justice and peace.”



## REVIVING THE JORDAN

- FoEME recommends the release of 400-600 million cubic meters (mcm) of fresh water into the river every year.
- In addition, the Jordan needs to flood at least once each year in order to keep the river's ecosystem healthy (100m<sup>3</sup>/sec for 24 hours).
- FoEME recommends that Israel release 220mcm of water into the river each year, Syria 100mcm, and Jordan 90mcm. FoEME also recognizes that Palestine, as a riparian to the river, has a right to a fair share of the Jordan's water.
- FoEME's analysis has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved by these countries (primarily through reduction of leaks, improvements to irrigation efficiency, water harvesting and grey-water recycling, and demand management) and used to revive the river and to restore Palestinian water rights.
- The revival of the river requires that Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian decision-makers implement national policy strategies to manage their own demand for water, and to cooperate in the implementation of a comprehensive trans-boundary master plan for the river.
- This master plan should determine levels of water flow, set water quality standards, identify ways to eliminate pollution, define ecological corridors, support environmental rehabilitation programs, and advance plans for the development of eco-tourism in the Jordan Valley.
- Implementation of a master plan requires the establishment of a functioning trans-boundary commission to manage the valley's water resources, resolve disputes, and strengthen the mechanisms of cooperation.



## II. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

## THE BLESSING OF WATER: A SERMON ON THE JORDAN RIVER

Father Gregory Collins

Abbot of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem

### On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh (Hymn for Advent)

Every year since the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians in both east and west have celebrated the dramatic event, (recorded in the three "Synoptic Gospels", Matthew, Mark and Luke), with which the ministry of Jesus began: his baptism in the river Jordan.

It is one of the great moments in the Christian understanding of salvation history. Jesus had been living an ordinary life, indeed a hidden life, as a carpenter in the obscure village of Nazareth. Suddenly he appears at the banks of the Jordan. He comes into contact with the strange, outlandish figure of John the Baptist, a wild man, a desert dweller, a prophet, who has been preaching an austere message of conversion, calling on people to change their lives and accept baptism for the forgiveness of their sins because the kingdom of God is drawing near.

Suddenly Jesus appears. Although sinless, he voluntarily joins the row of repentant sinners and consents to receive the purifying waters administered by the Baptist's hand. It is a profound gesture of divine solidarity with sinful and suffering humankind. Suddenly there is a dramatic manifestation. The heavens are opened and the voice of God the Father is heard declaring that Jesus is his beloved Son. A further level of symbolism is added in the descending dove, representing the Holy Spirit. This signifies Jesus' anointing, the act by which

he is manifested not only as God's unique and eternal Son-made-flesh but as the long-awaited Messiah, Christos in Greek, the One who will bring in the kingdom of God. St. Luke in his account adds a small but highly significant detail, typical of his interest in the more intimate, private aspects of Jesus' relationship with his heavenly Father – he tells us that Jesus received the Holy Spirit while he was at prayer.

The whole scene is a tremendous epiphany, or more precisely a theophany - a manifestation of God, who, for Christians, is understood to be the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a hymn from the Byzantine liturgy, the three are identified as such. The Son appears as a servant - the unique suffering servant of God prophesied by Isaiah; the voice of the Father is heard, bearing witness to his only Son; the Holy Spirit's form recalls the dove which signaled the end of the great flood, appearing at Noah's ark with the leaf of the olive tree in its beak. But water has always been a massively important symbol in the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether it was the original waters over the face of which God's Spirit hovered at the dawn of creation, or the great river which Ezekiel in his vision saw issuing from the restored Temple in Jerusalem and flowing down towards the desert places of the Holy land, giving them new life and fertility.

None of that is entirely unique to the Judeo-Christian tradition. After all, water is, as the

Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung so often noted, a basic archetypal symbol for new life, fertility, rebirth and rejuvenation. It functions as such in every religion and in every major belief system. It is small wonder then that the Jewish tradition (so associated in its geographical location with the preservation of water as a precious commodity) should frequently employ it as a metaphor for God's saving presence, or that the ministry of Jesus – who promised to give his followers a water that would quench every thirst – should have begun on the banks of the Jordan, the river that Joshua had crossed to bring the people of God into the promised land. To this day, the waters of the Jordan are associated with the sacrament of baptism. Many people still travel there to be baptized in the same river as Jesus and some of its water is still brought to England for the baptism of royal babies.

Yet if one stands today on Jordan's banks one does indeed hear a cry, but it is not that of the Baptist: rather, nature herself is crying! She is weeping hard and long. It is difficult not to feel that one is witnessing a very different miracle from the great revelation at Jesus' baptism. The miracle is that the sad, depressing, depleted trickle of water, oozing along where this mighty river once flowed has not simply given up the ghost and died long ago! For this great river, so rich in symbolic associations for Jews and Christians, is but a poor shadow of its self:

it has become a standing testimony to what we grasping humans are capable of doing to God's beautiful creation, when our actions are inspired largely by political and economic pragmatism - and uninspired by any larger sense of cosmic vision.

"This great river...has become a standing testimony to what we are capable of doing to God's creation when our actions are uninspired by any larger sense of cosmic vision"

In the liturgies of the eastern churches, the feast of the baptism of Jesus on 6 January includes a great blessing of whatever waters are present in the vicinity of the celebration – rivers, lakes or streams. The texts used often echo ancient beliefs that water, the primal source of life, has become the abode of demons. The blessing of the waters is therefore a kind of exorcism which expels the power of evil from them. Syrian liturgical texts also speak of the fire of Christ's divinity going down into the water to bless and purify it. It is a powerful prophecy of his future descent into the Underworld on Holy Saturday, where he goes to destroy death by his death before rising in glory to the new life of the resurrection.

But nowadays it is hard to avoid a powerful feeling: it is not the waters which need exorcism. Rather it is we ourselves! It is we, we

who so disastrously project our own negativity out of ourselves and on to the world of nature – we are the ones who need to ask for cleansing from the demonic powers of evil, sin and death!

Nature itself is God’s primal sacrament, his first great self-manifestation to us. In its cosmic structures, in its order and harmony, in its rhythm of light and darkness and above all in its overwhelming beauty, it is meant to awaken us to the presence of the divine. It is meant to remind us, as St. Augustine saw, that the lovely things of the earth all point to their even lovelier Source, the Creator God; and as the English Jesuit and nature poet Gerard Manley Hopkins stressed, to God’s even better beauty – grace!

“Nature itself is God’s primal sacrament... in its order and harmony, in its rhythm of light and darkness, and above all in its overwhelming beauty, it is meant to awaken us to the presence of the divine”

But it is hard for today’s Jordan to do that, hard for it to be a sacrament of cosmic beauty, hard for it to remind us of the grace that flowed in the mystery of Jesus’ baptism. For it to do that again, concerted action is needed – action by the governments through whose territories it flows, action enabling it to become a source of life-giving water once again. And we need to act on ourselves – to root out of our hearts all those impulses of negligence and laziness, or worse still of active exploitation, which damage nature, obscure God’s manifestation in and through his

beautiful world and deprive our fellow human beings of this inestimable source of life and vitality. But we also need to take practical action such as supporting groups like Friends of the Earth Middle East and others, who work to cherish and protect the environment.

May the Creator God, the Source of all beings, who wishes to make his presence known through the beauty of his works and who in Christian belief, saved and re-consecrated the earth in Christ’s incarnation death and resurrection, purify us, so that we too can purify the earth and liberate this once great river to become again what it is meant to be: a cosmic sacrament of God’s overflowing life and grace.

Amen.

## THE SACREDNESS OF WATER

An Orthodox Christian Reflection on Creation Care

Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Throne

The cleansing and conservation of the Jordan River is a critical project from an ecological, but also from a religious – indeed, an interfaith – perspective. The rehabilitation of the lower Jordan River valley is an invaluable enterprise to promote the health and welfare of the people in the surrounding region as well as an admirable initiative to foster inter-religious dialogue and peace among Jews, Christians and Muslims, all of whom venerate the historical and religious significance of the Jordan River.

### I. WATER, NATURE, AND SPIRIT

Water is as fundamental in the natural life as it is in the spiritual world. As the Book of Genesis says: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God’s spirit hovered over the water” (Gen. 1.1-2). Just as water is the essence of all life, water is also the primary element in the life a Christian, where the sacrament of Baptism marks the sacred source of the spiritual life.

The striking connection between the natural world and the world of the Spirit is indicated in the ceremony of the Great Blessing of the Waters, performed in the Orthodox Church on January 6th, the Feast of Theophany, when Orthodox Christians commemorate Christ’s Baptism in the Jordan River. The service contains the same prayers and hymns used in the baptism of every Orthodox Christian.

The Great Blessing begins with a hymn of praise to God for the beauty and harmony of creation:

Great art You, O Lord, and marvelous are Your works: no words suffice to sing the praise of Your wonders. . . . The sun sings Your praises; the moon glorifies You; the stars supplicate before You; the light obeys You; the deeps are afraid at Your presence; the fountains are Your servants; You have stretched out the heavens like a curtain; You have established the earth upon the waters; You have walled about the sea with sand; You have poured forth the air that living things may breathe.

Water, then, signifies the depth of life and the calling to cosmic transfiguration. It can never be regarded or treated as private property or become the means and end of individual interest. Indifference towards the vitality of water constitutes both a blasphemy to God the Creator and a crime against humanity. Through the pollution or contamination of the world’s waters, the destruction is procured of the planet’s entire ecosystem, which receives its life from unceasing communication, like communicating vessels, of the watery subterranean or supraterrestrial arteries of the earth.

### II. THE BLESSING OF THE JORDAN

In the Orthodox Church, the commemoration of the Baptism of our Lord in the waters of the Jordan River constitutes the second most significant feast of the liturgical cycle after the celebration of the Resurrection. The hymns of that day, on January the 6th, proclaim:

The nature of waters is sanctified, the earth is blessed, and the heavens are enlightened . . . so that by the elements of creation, and

by the angels, and by human beings, by things both visible and invisible, God's most holy name may be glorified.

The implication is that Jesus Christ assumed human flesh in order to redeem and sanctify every aspect and detail of this world. The direct manifestation of this was his baptism in the Jordan River, which is in fact the consequence and culmination of God becoming human. This is why, on that day each year, Orthodox Christians will reserve and bottle a portion of the blessed water, with which they subsequently return and bless their homes and families, offices and spaces, gardens and animals.

The breadth and depth, therefore, of the Orthodox cosmic vision implies that humanity is a part of this magnificent epiphany, an interconnected and interdependent piece of what St. Maximus the Confessor in the 7<sup>th</sup> century called "a cosmic liturgy". Thus, the future of this planet assumes critical importance for the kingdom of heaven.

One of the early symbols of Christ, whereby Christians recognized one another, was the fish – the Greek word being an acronym for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." The fish, then, is a soteriological statement of faith. Christ has been intimately and integrally identified with fish. Any pollution of water or over-fishing relates in a personal and intimate way to Christ himself.

Until we can perceive in the pollution of our planet – and especially the contamination of

its waters, which constitutes and covers such a critical part of our bodies and of our world – the portrait of our **brother and sister**, then we cannot hope to resolve the inequalities of our world. Indeed, until we discern in the pollution of our planet the face of our children, we will not comprehend the irreversible consequences of our actions.

### III. THE SPIRITUAL WEB OF LIFE

In acknowledging the sacredness of the waters, we are proclaiming our belief that environmental protection is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem that concerns all of us. The initial and crucial response to the environmental crisis is for each of us to bear personal responsibility for the way that we live and for the values that we treasure and the priorities that we pursue. To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is a sin against God and creation.

It also constitutes a matter of social and economic justice. As we mentioned in our opening address, there is a close link between the living conditions of the poor or vulnerable and the ecology of the planet. Those of us living in more affluent nations either consume or corrupt far too much of the earth's resources. Conservation and compassion are intimately connected. The web of life is a sacred gift of God – so very precious and so very delicate. We must honor our neighbor and preserve our world with both humility and generosity, in a perspective

of frugality and solidarity. The footprint that we leave on our world must become lighter, much lighter.

When we understand the intimate connection and inter-dependence of all persons and all things in the "cosmic liturgy," then we can begin to resolve issues of ecology and economy. Then our generation will properly consider and dignify the welfare of future generations. There would be a code of ethics to determine behavior and trade, and a clear sense of this world as our common responsibility, with us as its caretakers.

This world was created by a loving God, who is – according to the foremost and traditional symbol of faith in the early Church – "maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." The Judeo-Christian Scriptures state, in the opening book of the Pentateuch: "God saw everything that was created good and, indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1.31).

How can we possibly stand before the unique significance and awesome beauty of the Jordan River without recalling this original plan of God?

How can we not rejoice at the cleansing and conservation of this sacred river, which God himself once deemed worthy of revealing himself as Holy Trinity and of plunging his incarnate Word, Jesus Christ? May God continue to bless this river and all those who work for its preservation and who long to be immersed in its sanctifying waters.

May we all long celebrate the sacredness, safekeeping and sanctification of the waters of this magnificent river.



## THE JORDAN RIVER AND THE NATURAL WORLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### THE GARDEN OF THE LORD...

8 Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.

9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. [This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.]

11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.

12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

#### Genesis 13

### THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF...

1 The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

5 He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

8 Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

9 Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

#### Psalms 24

### THE WORK OF THY FINGERS...

1 LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

6 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

8 The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

9 O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

#### Psalms 8

### INTO A GOOD LAND

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills;

8 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;

9 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

#### Deuteronomy 8

## THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE GOSPELS

### THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

**John, 1:23**

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

**Matthew 3:16-17**

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

**Luke 3:21-22**

## PRAYERS, POEMS, AND OTHER WRITINGS

### PRAISED BE YOU MY LORD, THROUGH SISTER WATER...

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,  
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.  
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
Who is the day through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,  
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.  
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon  
and the stars,  
In the heavens you have made them bright,  
precious and fair.  
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind  
and Air,  
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,  
by which You cherish all that You have made.  
Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,  
So useful, humble, precious and pure.  
Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,  
through whom You light the night  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.  
Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,  
Mother Earth  
who sustains and governs us,  
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers  
and herbs.  
Praise be You my Lord through those who grant  
pardon  
for love of You and bear sickness and trial.  
Blessed are those who endure in peace,

By You Most High, they will be crowned.  
Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,  
from whom no-one living can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!  
Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.  
No second death can do them harm.  
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,  
And serve Him with great humility.

**Saint Francis of Assisi (1181 – 1226),  
Canticle of the Sun**

### FROM THE GREAT BLESSING OF THE WATER (PART OF THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY / THEOPHANY)

The voice of the Lord cries over the waters,  
saying: Come all ye, receive the Spirit of  
wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the  
Spirit of the fear of God, even Christ who is  
made manifest. Today the nature of water is  
sanctified. Jordan is divided in two, and turns  
back the stream of its waters, beholding the  
Master being baptized. As a man Thou didst  
come to that river, O Christ our King, and dost  
hasten O Good One, to receive the baptism of a  
servant at the hands of the Forerunner (John),  
because of our sins, O Lover of Man.

## TO INJURE THE NATURAL WORLD IS A SIN...

To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to injure other human beings by contaminating the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances-- these are sins."

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

## ON THE HAND OF GOD IN THE NATURAL WORLD...

I raised my eyes aloft, and I beheld  
The scattered chapters of the Universe  
Gathered and bound into a single book  
By the austere and tender hand of God.

Dante Alighieri (1265 – 1321)

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.  
Every creature is full of God and is a book about God.  
Every creature is a word of God.  
If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar –  
I would never have to prepare a sermon  
So full of God is every creature.

Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1327)

## ON MAN'S 'DOMINION'...

...man's dominion cannot be understood as license to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures... At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God's bountiful treasures.

Father Lanfranco Serrini, Minister General of the Franciscan Order

## WATER - MIRROR OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT...

In planning our Festival of Faiths, we learned that before the first mirror was ever fashioned, water served as the original, primordial mirror...one member of the community responded, "The notion of water as the first mirror makes me think that even today, a community's values are reflected in its water. What are our polluted rivers and streams saying about us?"

Elena Lloyd-Sidle - Water: Its Spiritual Significance

## A PRAYER FROM THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS...

Almighty and merciful God, Father of all, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, Lord of History, whose designs are inscrutable, whose glory is without blemish, whose compassion is inexhaustible, in your will is our peace...

In this fatal moment of choice in which we might begin the patient architecture of peace (and sustainability) we may also take the last step across the rim of chaos. Save us then from our obsessions! Open our eyes, dissipate confusions, teach us to understand ourselves.

Thomas Merton – Passion for Peace

## WENDELL BERRY ON THE URGENCY OF THIS WORK...

To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival.

Wendell Berry - The Art of the Commonplace

## THOMAS MERTON ON THE LOSS OF WISDOM...

But man has lost his "sight" and is blundering about aimlessly in the midst of the wonderful works of God. It is in thinking that he sees, in gaining his power and technical know-how, that he has lost his wisdom and his cosmic perspective.

Thomas Merton

## THOMAS BERRY ON THE SENSE OF WONDER...

I look forward to a renewal of a world of wonder. As children the truly great moments in our lives were those moments when we watched the evening sky or wandered across a meadow to wade in a nearby creek, the moments when

we were outside playing games or learning the languages of the flowers and trees, the birds, the insects, the butterflies.

In this way we learned something of the numinous world present throughout our natural surroundings, the world beyond human explanation, the world that we can express only in our mythic stories of spirit presences.

This was the world of play and delight and laughter, the world of poetry and story telling, of music and dance and freedom. It was the world of heroic tales, of Cinderella, of her slipper and the Prince, of Robin Hood—his taking from the rich and giving to the poor. It was a sacred world, a world that could not be bought or sold, could not be made by humans. It was the world that brought us into being, nourished, educated us, guided and healed us, and in the end brought us safely through the turmoil and struggle of this earthly existence into an abiding and serene world beyond what we could find here.

The main difficulty in human affairs in these opening years of the twenty-first century seems to be the loss of our sense of wonder, our sense of the sacred, our sense of play and laughter, our inability to respond to the dawn or sunset, the loss of our vision of the stars. One of the most exquisite words in the human vocabulary is wonderful, the word we use when we speak of those we love or when we describe an exciting moment in our lives. So now my hope is that the wonder we experienced in childhood will return to quiet our restless souls in this new age of anxiety that has descended upon us.

Thomas Berry, Wonder

## HYMNS & SONGS

The Jordan River has a particular place in the Christian songbook, and especially in the spiritual and gospel music of the American South. 'Crossing the Jordan' is a metaphor for passing over the threshold that divides this life from the heavenly paradise beyond. Again and again, it is used as a symbol of home-coming and peace at the end of life's journey. But for the slaves who first sang these songs, 'going over Jordan' had another, more subversive meaning: escaping into freedom, just as the Israelites had crossed the river and gained the promised land after long years of slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness.

### SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT

Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry me home  
I looked over Jordan and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home  
A band of angels coming after me  
Coming for to carry me home  
If you get there before I do  
Coming for to carry me home  
Tell all my friends I'm coming to  
Coming for to carry me home

### DEEP RIVER

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,  
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into camp  
ground.

My Lord, he calls me  
He calls me by the thunder.  
The trumpet sounds within my soul:  
I ain't got long to stay here.

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,  
Deep river, Lord, I'm gonna cross over into  
campground.

### MICHAEL, ROW THE BOAT ASHORE

There are many versions of this song, which was first published in Slave Songs of the United States in 1867. This is one of the versions that names the Jordan River.

Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
My brothers and sisters are all aboard,  
hallelujah  
My brothers and sisters are all aboard,  
hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

The river is deep and the river is wide,  
hallelujah  
Milk and honey on the other side, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

Jordan's river is chilly and cold, hallelujah  
Chills the body but warms the soul, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

My brothers and sisters are all aboard,  
hallelujah  
My brothers and sisters are all aboard,  
hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

The river is deep and the river is wide,  
hallelujah  
Milk and honey on the other side, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

Jordan's river is chilly and cold, hallelujah  
Chills the body but warms the soul, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah  
Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah

### ROLL JORDAN ROLL

Roll Jordan, roll  
I want to go to heav'n when I die  
To hear ol' Jordan roll  
O brethern  
Roll Jordan, roll  
Roll Jordan, roll  
I want to go to heav'n when I die  
To hear ol' Jordan roll

Oh, brothers you oughter been dere  
Yes my Lord  
A-sittin' in the Kingdom  
To hear ol' Jordan roll  
Sing it over  
Oh, sinner you oughter been dere  
Yes my Lord  
A-sittin' in the Kingdom  
To hear ol' Jordan roll

### MARCH DOWN TO JORDAN

You gotta march down, march down  
You gotta march down to Jordan  
Hallelujah  
You gotta march down, march down  
You gotta march down to Jordan  
Hallelujah  
Where are you goin' my sisters?  
Where are you goin' now?  
Oh well we're goin' on down  
to the river Jordan  
Gonna wash our sins away  
Have you heard of-a that city  
They say it's built four square  
He said He wanted you people  
To meet Him over there

### SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?

Shall we gather at the river,  
Where bright angel feet have trod,  
With its crystal tide forever  
Flowing by the throne of God?

Refrain

Yes, we'll gather at the river,  
The beautiful, the beautiful river;  
Gather with the saints at the river  
That flows by the throne of God.  
On the margin of the river,  
Washing up its silver spray,  
We will talk and worship ever,  
All the happy golden day.

Refrain

Ere we reach the shining river,  
Lay we every burden down;  
Grace our spirits will deliver,  
And provide a robe and crown.

Refrain

At the smiling of the river,  
Mirror of the Savior's face,  
Saints, whom death will never sever,  
Lift their songs of saving grace.

Refrain

Soon we'll reach the silver river,  
Soon our pilgrimage will cease;  
Soon our happy hearts will quiver  
With the melody of peace.

Refrain

## RIVER OF JORDAN

By Peter, Paul and Mary

I traveled the banks of the River of Jordan  
To find where it flows to the sea  
I looked in the eyes of the cold and the hungry  
And I saw I was looking at me  
I wanted to know if life had a purpose  
And what it all means in the end  
In the silence I listened to voices inside me  
And they told me again and again  
There is only one river, there is only one sea  
And it flows through you, and it flows through  
me  
There is only one people, we are one and the  
same  
We are all one spirit, we are all one name  
We are the father, mother, daughter and son  
From the dawn of creation, we are one, we are

one, we are one  
Well, every blade of grass on the mountain  
Every drop in the sea  
Oh, every cry of a newborn baby  
Every prayer to be free  
Every hope at the end of a rainbow  
Every song ever sung  
Is a part of the family of woman and man  
And that means everyone  
We are only one river, we are only one sea  
And it flows through you, and it flows through  
me  
We are only one people, we are one and the  
same  
We are all one spirit, we are all one name  
We are the father, mother, daughter and son  
From the dawn of creation, we are one, we are  
one  
We are one, we are one  
We are only one river, we are only one sea  
And it flows through you, and it flows through  
me  
We are only one people, we are one and the  
same  
We are all one spirit, we are all one name  
We are the father, mother, daughter and son  
From the dawn of creation, we are one, we are  
one  
We are one, we are one

## AWAY FAR OVER JORDAN

Away far over Jordan  
We'll meet in that land  
Oh, won't that be grand  
Away far over Jordan  
We'll meet in that beautiful land  
How grand

If you get there before I do

Just wait for me  
For I'm coming too  
Away far over Jordan  
We'll meet in that beautiful land, how grand!

## RIVER OF JORDAN

by Hazel Houser

To the river of Jordan our Savior went one day,  
And we read that John the Baptist met him  
there.  
When John baptised Jesus in Jordan's rushing  
water,  
The mighty power of God filled the air

I'm on my way, (to the river of Jordan,)  
Gonna walk right in, (in the rushing waters)  
I'm goin there, (I'm goin down to the river of  
Jordan)  
And let the cool waters cleanse my soul.

King Naimen was stricken with dreaded leprosy,  
And he sent for the man of God to pray,  
But Elijah said to Naimen, go dip yourself in  
Jordan,  
And let the cool water wash your spots away.

So he went right down (to the river of Jordan),  
He went right in (in the rushing water)  
He dipped himself (He dipped himself in river of  
Jordan)  
And the cool waters made him whole.

The River of Jordan is many miles away,  
This mighty river I may never see,  
But I'll find myself an altar in an old fashioned  
church.  
My river of Jordan that will be.

## WAYFARING STRANGER

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger  
I'm traveling through this world of woe  
Yet there's no sickness, toil nor danger  
In that bright land to which I go

I'm going there to see my mother/father  
I'm going there no more to roam  
I'm only going over Jordan  
I'm only going over home

I know dark clouds will gather 'round me  
I know my way is rough and steep  
Yet golden fields lie just before me  
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep

I'm going there to see my father/mother  
S/he said he'd/she'd meet me when I come  
I'm only going over Jordan  
I'm only going over home

I want to wear a crown of glory  
When I get home to that good land  
I want to shout salvation's story  
In concert with the blood-washed band

I'm going there to meet my Saviour  
To sing his praise forever more  
I'm just a-going over Jordan  
I'm just a-going over home

## TIMES AND SEASONS

### January - The Feast of Epiphany (Theophany) and the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

At the close of the great Christmas liturgy comes the feast of Epiphany (also known as Theophany). In the Eastern churches, this feast is primarily a celebration of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and its liturgy includes the blessing of the waters. In the Western church, Epiphany came to be primarily a celebration of the coming of the Magi, and Roman Catholics now celebrate the baptism of Jesus on a separate day - usually on the first Sunday after Epiphany.

There is no more appropriate season in which to reflect on the story of the baptism and on the state of the river today.

Christian leaders will, of course, be familiar with the significance and liturgy of this feast. Lay men and women may be interested in the following excerpts from the Orthodox service, including the prayers for the blessing of water.

#### FROM THE TROPARION OF THE FEAST -

When in the Jordan Thou wast baptised, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bare witness unto Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son, and the Spirit, in the form of a Dove, confirmed the steadfastness of that word. O Christ our God, who didst manifest Thyself and dost enlighten the world: glory to Thee.

#### FROM THE PRIEST'S PRAYER AT THE BLESSING OF THE WATERS -

Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and speech sufficeth not to sing the praises of Thy wonders. For Thou, by Thy will, from nothingness hast brought all things into being; by Thy majesty Thou dost uphold all creation, and by Thy providence Thou dost direct the world. When Thou hadst framed the universe out of four elements, Thou didst crown the circle of the year with four seasons. All the reason-endowed powers tremble before Thee.

The sun singeth Thy praises, and the moon glorifieth Thee; the stars, also, stand before Thy presence. The light obeyeth Thee. The deeps shudder with awe before Thee; the water-springs do Thy bidding. Thou hast spread out the heavens like a curtain. Thou hast established the earth upon the waters. With sand hast Thou walled in the sea. Thou hast shed abroad the air for breathing. The Angelic powers serve Thee. The Archangelic hosts adore Thee. The many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim, as they stand round about and do fly, veil their faces with awe before Thine unapproachable glory. For Thou, the God which cannot be circumscribed, who art from everlasting and ineffable, didst come down upon earth, taking on the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of men. For Thou couldst not endure, O Master, because of Thy tender hearted mercy, to behold

the children of men tormented by the devil; but Thou didst come, and didst save us. We confess Thy grace; we proclaim Thy mercy; we conceal not Thy gracious deeds. Thou hast set at liberty the generations of our race; by Thy birth Thou hast sanctified a Virgin's womb. All creation singeth praises unto Thee, who didst reveal Thyself; for Thou, our God, didst manifest Thyself upon earth, and didst dwell among men. Thou didst hallow, also, the streams of Jordan, in that Thou didst send down from heaven Thy Holy Spirit, and didst crush the heads of the serpents which lurked there. Wherefore do Thou, O King who lovest mankind, come down now also through the descent of Thy Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water.

The voice of the Lord cries over the waters, saying: Come all ye, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, even Christ who is made manifest. Today the nature of water is sanctified. Jordan is divided in two, and turns back the stream of its waters, beholding the Master being baptized. As a man Thou didst come to that river, O Christ our King, and dost hasten O Good One, to receive the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner (John), because of our sins, O Lover of Man.

## OTHER REFLECTIONS & INSIGHTS

Non-ecclesiastical writings urging care for creation

### NELSON MANDELA ON SEEING BEYOND OUR OWN LIFETIME...

“Our clean flowing rivers must be known by my grandchildren’s grandchildren, many years from now, just as I knew them as a child, many years ago.”

Nelson Mandela

### ‘NOW THE WATERS ARE POISONED’

Two recitals from the United Nations Environmental Sabbath Program

We have forgotten who we are.  
We have forgotten who we are.  
We have alienated ourselves from the unfolding of the cosmos.  
We have become estranged from the movements of the earth.  
We have turned our backs on the cycles of life.  
We have forgotten who we are.  
We have sought only our own security.  
We have exploited simply for our own ends.  
We have distorted our knowledge.  
We have abused our power.  
We have forgotten who we are.  
Now the land is barren.  
And the waters are poisoned.  
And the air is polluted.  
We have forgotten who we are.  
Now the forests are dying,  
And the creatures are disappearing,  
And the humans are despairing.

We have forgotten who we are.  
We ask for forgiveness.  
We ask for the gift of remembering.  
We ask for the strength to change.  
We have forgotten who we are.

UN Environmental Sabbath Program

### TO RESTORE THE WATERS...

We join with the earth and each other.  
To bring new life to the land  
To restore the waters  
To refresh the air.  
We join with the earth and each other.  
To renew the forests  
To care for the plants  
To protect the creatures.  
We join with the earth and each other.  
To celebrate the seas  
To rejoice in the sunlight  
To sing the song of the stars.  
We join with the earth and each other.  
To recreate the human community  
To promote justice and peace  
To remember our children.  
We join with the earth and each other.  
We join together as many and diverse expressions  
Of one loving mystery: for the healing of the Earth and the renewal of all life.

UN Environmental Sabbath Program

### ON SPIRITUAL INSIGHT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION...

Religious experience involves an encounter with the sacred, an intuition of the awesome and wondrous mystery in the power of being. The experience of the sacred is of critical importance in the transformation of human attitudes towards nature and the awakening of a new moral faith. An appreciation of the miracle of life and of the beauty and mystery in the being of animals, plants, and the earth as a whole must become so intense as to generate a keen sense of the natural world’s sacredness. Dostoevsky’s Father Zossima speaks about a religious appreciation of nature: “Love all God’s creation, the whole earth and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you begin to perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.” A fresh awareness of the sacred values in nature fosters respect and moral responsibility.

Steven C Rockefeller, *Spirit and Nature*

### ON OUR INTER-DEPENDENCE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD...

Humans have become so numerous and our tools so powerful that we have driven fellow creatures to extinction, dammed the great rivers, torn down ancient forests, poisoned the earth, rain and wind, and ripped holes in the sky.

Our science has brought pain as well as joy; our comfort is paid for by the suffering of millions. We are learning from our mistakes, we are mourning our vanished kin, and we now build a new politics of hope.

We respect and uphold the absolute need for clean air, water and soil.

We see that economic activities that benefit the few while shrinking the inheritance of many are wrong.

And since environmental degradation erodes biological capital forever, full ecological and social cost must enter all equations of development.

We are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase. So where knowledge is limited, we will remember all those who will walk after us, and err on the side of caution.

The Declaration of Inter-dependence, David Suzuki Foundation

## CHRISTIAN DECLARATIONS AND ESSAYS ON ECOLOGY

### THE CHRISTIAN DECLARATION ON NATURE Father Lanfranco Serrini

#### JOHN RUSKIN ON THE SACRED SIGNATURE OF NATURE IN THE NATURAL WORLD...

There is religion in everything around us—a calm and holy religion in the unbreathing things of nature, which man would do well to imitate. It is a meek and blessed influence, stealing in, as it were, unawares upon the heart; it comes quietly, and without excitement; it has no terror, no gloom, in its approaches; it does not rouse up the passions; it is untrammelled by the creeds, and unshadowed by the superstitions, of man; it is fresh from the hands of its Author, glowing from the immediate presence of the Great Spirit, which pervades and quickens it; it is written on the arched sky; it looks out from every star; it is on the sailing cloud and in the invisible wind; it is among the hills and valleys of the earth, where the shrubless mountain-top pierces the thin atmosphere of eternal winter, or where the mighty forest fluctuates before the strong wind with its dark waves of green foliage; it is spread out, like a legible language, upon the broad face of the unsleeping ocean; it is the poetry of nature; it is this which uplifts the spirit within us until it is strong enough to overlook the shadows of our place of probation; which breaks, link after link, the chain that binds us to materiality; and which opens to our imagination a world of spiritual beauty and holiness.

John Ruskin

#### VĀCLAV HAVEL ON SPIRITUAL INTUITION AND ECOLOGY...

As a boy, I lived for a time in the country and I clearly remember an experience from those days: I used to walk school in a nearby village along a cart track through the fields and, on the way, see on the horizon a huge smokestack of war. It spewed dense brown smoke and scattered it across the sky. Each time I saw it, I had an intense sense of something profoundly wrong, of humans soiling the heavens. I have no idea whether there was something like a science of ecology in those days; if there was, I certainly knew nothing of it. It seemed to me that, in it, humans are guilty of something, that they destroy something important, arbitrarily disrupting the natural order of things, and that such things cannot go unpunished.

Václav Havel - Politics and Conscience

This declaration forms part of the original Assisi Declarations on Nature which were created in 1986, at a meeting held in Assisi at which five leaders of the five major world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism – were invited to come and discuss how their faiths could help save the natural world.

“PRAISE THE LORD ... Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! For he commanded and they were created... Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his commands!” **(Psalm 148)**

To praise the Lord for his creation is to confess that God the Father made all things visible and invisible; it is to thank him for the many gifts he bestows on all his children.

God created everything that exists, freely, by his word, and out of nothing. He alone is totally other, transcendent and immutable, whereas all creatures are contingent, mutable and wholly dependent on him for their existence. No creature can claim to be part of his nature or a “spark” of his Being; but, by reason of its created origin, each according to its species and all together in the harmonious unity of the universe manifest God’s infinite truth and beauty, love and goodness, wisdom and majesty, glory and power.

God declared everything to be good, indeed, very good. He created nothing unnecessarily and has omitted nothing that is necessary. Thus, even in the mutual opposition of the various elements of the universe, there exists a divinely willed harmony because creatures have received their mode of existence by the

will of their Creator, whose purpose is that through their interdependence they should bring to perfection the beauty of the universe. It is the very nature of things considered in itself, without regard to man’s convenience or inconvenience, that gives glory to the Creator.

But it is especially through man and woman, made in the image and likeness of God and entrusted with a unique dominion over all visible creatures, that the Lord’s goodness and providence are to be manifested. This is how the Psalmist sings of man’s nobility: “When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet, you have made him little less than God, and you crown him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.”

The Fathers of the Church understood well the marvel of man’s dual citizenship and the responsibilities it placed upon him. In the words of St Gregory of Nazianzen, “God set man upon earth as a kind of second world, a microcosm; another kind of angel, a worshipper of blended nature... He was a king of all upon earth, but subject to heaven; earthly and heavenly; transient, yet immortal; belonging both to the visible and to the intelligible order; midway between greatness and lowliness”.



Most certainly, then, because of the responsibilities which flow from his dual citizenship, man's dominion cannot be understood as licence to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures. On the one hand, man's position verges on a viceregal partnership with God; on the other, his self-mastery in symbiosis with creation must manifest the Lord's exclusive and absolute dominion over everything, over man and over his stewardship. At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God's bountiful treasures.

Every human act of irresponsibility towards creatures is an abomination. According to its gravity, it is an offence against that divine wisdom which sustains and gives purpose to the interdependent harmony of the universe.

Christians believe that the first man's refusal to live according to divine wisdom introduced disharmony into his relationship with God and creatures, and this rebellion has perpetuated itself in history in various forms of social and personal injustice, domination and exploitation, making it impossible for men and women to live in concord with one another and with the rest of creation.

But the heart of Christian faith resides in its proclamation of God's merciful fidelity to himself and to the works of his hands. Christians believe that God the Father has not abandoned men and women to their sinful ways but has sent the Savior

to bring redemption and healing to everyone and to all things. Indeed, they firmly confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God made man, that he is the fulfillment of his Father's covenant with Abraham for the salvation of all peoples and with Noah on behalf of all creation. They maintain that, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven in his glorified humanity, he reconciles all things visible and invisible, and that all creation is therefore purposefully orientated, in and through him, towards the future revelation of the glorious liberty of God's children, when, in the new heavens and the new earth, there will no longer be death, mourning, sadness or pain. Through Christ and through his life-giving Spirit, the Father creates and sanctifies, gives life, blesses and bestows all good things.

Christians therefore cannot be pessimistic about the future of the world, nor believe in its periodic disintegration and renewal, both of which would deny Christ's future coming to judge the living and the dead, when he shall bring his recompense to repay everyone for what he has done. The God of the living will not destroy what he has created, but, in the future transformation of the world, he will reward the just and punish the evil.

This Gospel influenced the relationship of men and women to the environment through monastic institutions. Benedictine monks, especially inspired by their founder's evangelical sense of the stewardship of natural resources, advocated a harmonious union between prayer and work, between intellectual and physical effort, and between theoretical and practical skills.

This Good News produced a unique example of man's reconciliation with all creatures in St Francis of Assisi, admired and invoked as the patron of ecologists and of those who are dedicated to the establishment of harmonious relations with the environment. Since God can express his will through all of his works, Francis was submissive to all creatures and scanned creation attentively, listening to its mysterious voices.

In his 'Canticle of Brother Sun' the saint called all creatures his brothers and sisters because they are God's gifts and signs of his providential and reconciling love. To God alone do they belong, to him they bear a likeness, and in his name Mother Earth, our sister, feeds us. In his personalized relationship with all creatures, St Francis recognized his duty to reciprocate divine love with love and praise, not only in the name of creatures, but in, with and through them.

For St. Francis, work was a God-given grace to be exercised in that spirit of faith and devotion to which every temporal consideration must be subordinate. All human effort in the world must therefore lead to a mutual enrichment of man and creatures.

Many are the causes of the ecological disaster which mankind faces today. Without pretending to be complete, the following should be singled out: uncontrolled use of technology for immediate economic growth, with little or no consideration for the planet's resources and their possible renewal; disregard for just and peaceful relations among peoples; destruction of cultures and environments during war;

ill-considered exploitation of natural resources by consumer-orientated societies; unmastered and unregulated urbanization; and the exclusive preoccupation with the present without any regard for the future quality of life.

Therefore, in the name of Christ, who will come to judge the living and the dead, Christians repudiate:

- All forms of human activity - wars, discrimination, and destruction of cultures - which do not respect the authentic interests of the human race, in accordance with God's will and design, and do not enable men as individuals and as members of society to pursue and fulfill their total vocation within the harmony of the universe;
- All ill considered exploitation of nature which threatens to destroy it and, in turn, to make man the victim of degradation.

In the name of Christ, who will repay everyone for good works, Christians call upon all men and women to pursue:

- A synthesis between culture and faith;
- Ecumenical dialogue on the goals of scientific research and on the environmental consequences of the use of its findings;
- The priority of moral values over technological advances;
- Truth, justice and the peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

## TO COMMIT A CRIME AGAINST THE NATURAL WORLD IS A SIN

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople

**His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew ascended to the Apostolic and first throne of the Orthodox Christian World in 1991. He is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians around the world and has earned the title “Green Patriarch” for his efforts to raise environmental awareness.**

The Ecumenical Throne of Orthodoxy, as a preserver and herald of the ancient Patristic tradition and of the rich liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church, today renews its long-standing commitment to healing the environment.

We have followed with great interest and sincere concern the efforts to curb the destructive effects that human beings have wrought upon the natural world. We view with alarm the dangerous consequences of humanity's disregard for the survival of God's creation.

We believe that Orthodox liturgy and life hold tangible answers to the ultimate questions concerning salvation from corruptibility and death. The Eucharist is at the very center of our worship. And our sin toward the world, or the spiritual root of all our pollution, lies in our refusal to view life and the world as a sacrament of thanksgiving, and as a gift of constant communion with God on a global scale.

We envision a new awareness that is not mere philosophical posturing, but a tangible experience of a mystical nature. We believe that our first task is to raise the consciousness of adults who most use the resources and gifts of the planet. Ultimately, it is for our children that we must perceive our every action in the world as having a direct effect upon the future of the environment.

At the heart of the relationship between man and environment is the relationship between human beings. As individuals, we live not only in vertical relationships to God and horizontal relationships to one another, but also in a complex web of relationships that extend throughout our lives, our cultures, and the material world. Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence, a complex fabric that we believe is fashioned by God.

People of all faith traditions praise the Divine, for they seek to understand their relationship to the cosmos. The entire universe participates in a celebration of life, which St. Maximos the Confessor described as a “cosmic liturgy.” We see this cosmic liturgy in the symbiosis of life's rich biological complexities. These complex relationships draw attention to themselves in humanity's self-conscious awareness of the cosmos. As human beings, created “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26), we are called to recognize this interdependence between our environment and ourselves. In the bread and the wine of the Eucharist, as priests standing before the altar of the world, we offer the Creation back to the Creator in relationship to Him and to each other.

Indeed, in our liturgical life, we realize by anticipation the final state of the cosmos in the

Kingdom of Heaven. We celebrate the beauty of creation and consecrate the life of the world, returning it to God with thanks. We share the world in joy as a living mystical communion with the Divine. Thus it is that we celebrate the beauty of creation, and consecrate the life of the world, returning it to God with thanks. We share the world in joy as a living mystical communion with the Divine.

Thus it is that we offer the fullness of creation at the Eucharist, and receive it back as a blessing, as the living presence of God. Moreover, there is also an ascetic element in our responsibility toward God's creation. This asceticism requires from us a voluntary restraint in order for us to live in harmony with our environment.

Asceticism offers practical examples of conservation. By reducing our consumption—in Orthodox theology, *Encratia*, or self-control—we come to ensure that resources are also left for others in the world. As we shift our will, we demonstrate a concern for the Third World and developing nations. Our abundance of resources will be extended to include an abundance of equitable concern for others.

We must challenge ourselves to see our personal, spiritual attitudes in continuity with public policy. *Encratia* frees us of our self-centered neediness, that we may do good works for others. We do this out of a personal love for the natural world around us. We are called to work in humble harmony with creation and not in arrogant supremacy against it. Asceticism provides an example whereby we may live simply.

Asceticism is not a flight from society and the world, but a communal attitude of mind and way of life that leads to the respectful use, and not the abuse, of material goods. Excessive consumption may be understood to issue from a worldview of estrangement from self, from land, from life, and from God. Consuming the fruits of the Earth unrestrained, we become consumed ourselves, by avarice and greed. Excessive consumption leaves us emptied, out of touch with our deepest self. Asceticism is a corrective practice, a vision of repentance. Such a vision will lead us from repentance to return, the return to a world in which we give to as well as take from creation.

We are called to be stewards, and reflections of God's love by example. Therefore, we proclaim the sanctity of all life, the entire creation being God's and reflecting His continuing will that life abound. We must love life so that others may see and know that it belongs to God. We must leave the judgment of our success to our Creator.

We lovingly suggest, to all the people of the Earth, that they seek to help one another to understand the myriad ways in which we are related to the Earth and to one another. In this way, we may begin to repair the dislocation many people experience in relation to creation. If human beings treated one another's personal property the way they treat their environment, we would view that behavior as antisocial. We would impose the judicial measures necessary to restore wrongly appropriated personal possessions. It is therefore appropriate for us to seek ethical, legal recourse where possible, in matters of ecological

crimes. It follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin.

For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands, for humans to injure other humans with disease, for humans to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances—these are sins. In prayer, we ask for the forgiveness of sins committed both willingly and unwillingly. And it is certainly God's forgiveness which we must ask, for causing harm to His own creation.

Thus we begin the process of healing our worldly environment, which was blessed with beauty and created by God. Then we may also begin to participate responsibly, as persons making informed choices, both in the integrated whole of creation and within our own souls.

We are urging a different and, we believe, a more satisfactory ecological ethic. This ethic is shared with many of the religious traditions. All of us hold the Earth to be God's creation, where He placed the newly created human "in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to guard it" (Genesis 2:15). He imposed on humanity a stewardship role in relationship to the Earth. How we treat the Earth and all of creation defines the relationship that each of us has with God. It is also a barometer of how we view one

another. For if we truly value a person, we are careful as to our behavior toward that person. The dominion that God has given humankind over the Earth does not extend to human relationships. We must be spokespeople for an ecological ethic that reminds the world that it is not ours to use for our own convenience. It is God's gift of love to us, and we must return His love by protecting it and all that is in it.

The Lord suffuses all of creation with His divine presence in one continuous legato from the substance of atoms to the Mind of God. Let us renew the harmony between heaven and Earth and transfigure every detail, every particle of life. Let us love one another, and lovingly learn from one another, for the edification of God's people, for the sanctification of God's creation, and for the glorification of God's most holy Name.

Amen.

## OTHER CHRISTIAN STATEMENTS ON ECOLOGY

There are many powerful Christian declarations about the ecological crisis and the relationship between faith and environmentalism that might be useful for engaging church groups.

### PEACE WITH GOD THE CREATOR, PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION

Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II  
World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990  
Available at: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

### MESSAGE ON THE DAY OF PRAYER FOR CREATION

His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch  
Dimitrios  
September 1989  
Available at: [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org)

### ON THE CARE OF CREATION AN EVANGELICAL DECLARATION ON ECOLOGY

By the Evangelical Environmental Network  
Available at: [www.creationcare.org](http://www.creationcare.org)

### THE AMERICAN BAPTIST POLICY STATEMENT ON ECOLOGY

An Ecological Situational Analysis  
Available at: [www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org)

### MINUTE OF CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

By the Friends United Meeting (Quakers)  
Available at: [www.creationjustice.org](http://www.creationjustice.org)

### GOD'S EARTH IS SACRED

An Open Letter to Church and Society in the US  
From the National Council of Churches  
Available at: [www.creationjustice.org](http://www.creationjustice.org)

For a more comprehensive list of Christian denominational statements and resource on creation care see: <http://www.blessedearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Denominational-Statements.pdf>.

## TROUBLING WATERS: THE JORDAN RIVER BETWEEN RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

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To receive a copy of this important essay please contact [info@foeme.org](mailto:info@foeme.org).

### ABSTRACT

Rivers are essential, environmental circulatory systems. They are also polyvalent repositories for religious and cultural meanings. This essay wades into the murky waters of the Jordan River and charts its shape from sociopolitical, environmental, and religious perspectives. Hovering in the Jordan's polysemic eddies, we find quandaries that are epistemic as well as ethical. This essay orients ethical reflection on the disjuncture between the symbolic stature of the Jordan River and its materially degraded status.



### III. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

## SAVING THE JORDAN, SAVING OURSELVES

A Christian Study prepared under the auspices of Friends of the Earth Middle East  
By Rev. Martin Otto Zimmann, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem

### TO THE BIBLE STUDY LEADER

The River Jordan is present in the thought and imagination of millions of people who have a preconceived notion of a desert oasis flowing from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. They imagine tranquil, clear pools and breezes stirring adjacent palm trees as exotic birds search for food among the reeds and bulrushes. This idyllic picture is a sad contrast to the current reality of the muddy, sewage-laden stream that trickles through a demilitarized zone between Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Security fences, land mines, guard towers, and armored vehicles are the norm. Untreated waste water makes religious pilgrims think twice before entering the river to perform baptisms.

The purpose of this Bible Study is to not only raise awareness of the degradation occurring in this sacred river valley, but also to evoke introspection in the participants as to how their consumer and lifestyle choices are connected to the exploitation of resources resulting in ecological tragedies such as this one.

This Bible Study can be adapted for a one day seminar, or two to three separate sessions. A version geared towards youth groups and accompanying Powerpoint presentations are available on the [SavetheJordan.com](http://SavetheJordan.com) website which you can adjust to fit the particular needs of your group. Slide numbers are shown in brackets [ ] throughout this document so as to keep the study in "syncopation" with the Powerpoint presentation if so desired.

Thank you for taking the time to lead this study. I pray it will lead to healthy paradigm shifts for those who take part in it. I welcome your feedback and conversation at [mozimmann@gmail.com](mailto:mozimmann@gmail.com).

**Rev. Dr. Martin Otto Zimmann**  
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS: BIBLES, FLIPCHART/WHITEBOARD, PROJECTION SYSTEM, FONT OR PRESENCE OF LIVING WATER, PENS AND NOTEBOOKS.**

### OPENING

Having a living body of water present could help people to think about the gift of water. If it is fitting within your church tradition, inviting people forward to remember their baptism through marking the sign of the cross on each other's foreheads would be an appropriate activity.

The leader can open the study with this or a similar prayer:

"Gracious God of life, as you anointed your Son with the Holy Spirit in the waters of the Jordan, so too anoint this time together with the presence of your Spirit, that all who take part in this study will grow in fervent faith and love toward You, each other, and all of God's creation. Help us in this time to examine our roles as stewards of creation, that we might serve as You desire, for it is in Your holy name that we live and breathe. Amen."

A song can be sung at this time. Songs can be found beginning on page 37 of the Sourcebook, or you can choose an appropriate hymn from the songbooks of your particular tradition. The hymn "Shall We Gather at the River" is shared on the Powerpoint [slides 2-9], but is only present as a helpful suggestion or placeholder.

To stimulate initial discussion, ask people what facts they know about the Jordan River. You may wish to write the answers where all can see them.

### DATA REGARDING THE JORDAN

Suggested activity: using Google earth, project the Sea of Galilee on a screen at approximately 20,000 feet, and then scroll south along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. Note the presence of industrialized agriculture sites, fish "ponds," and dried up oxbows where the river once flowed. Also note the presence of political boundaries and treaty lines that conform to the river itself.

Using the Powerpoint slides 10-15 (adapted from Friends of Earth Middle East at [http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record\\_id=23](http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record_id=23)); move through the data so that people can become familiarized with the ecological status of the river basin. If Powerpoint is not available, prepare a handout with the same data.

**Scripture Reading: Joshua 3:1; 14-17 [slide 16]**

## MEDITATION (FEEL FREE TO ADAPT THIS ACCORDING TO YOUR GROUP'S NEEDS)

Do you ever find yourself drawn to rivers? When the slings and arrows of this life are getting you down, do you ever find a bench in front of a flowing river and just sit, think, or pray?

The River Jordan is arguably the most famous river in the Bible with the river Nile as a distant second. A lot of important stuff happens at the Jordan—Naaman the Syrian king washes in the Jordan and is cured of his leprosy. In the scripture we just read, the Ark of the Covenant's presence in the midst of the river allows the ancient Israelites to cross on dry land. And most importantly, the Spirit of God descended like a dove and rested on Jesus during his baptism in the river.

Today the Jordan River is a demilitarized zone—a buffer between the nation of Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. Calling it a 'river' may be an exaggeration in this current context. It's more of a creek really. If it weren't for the sewage and run-off being emptied into it, the river would cease to flow altogether.

Rivers are important. They are the pulsing life blood of this planet—the arteries and veins that keep the cycle of life going. And as humans, we are drawn to them. We build cities around them. We sing songs about them—Americans sing river songs during the Holiday Season such as "Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go!" or "I wish I had a river, I would skate away..." (kind of a more melancholy holiday tune).

### QUESTION: WHAT OTHER RIVER SONGS CAN YOU THINK OF? (REFER TO PAGE 37 IN THIS SOURCEBOOK)

One of my favorite river songs "Down to the River to Pray" was featured in a movie called O Brother Where Art Thou? The movie version was sung by Alison Kraus. You can access the clip here (be sure to turn up your speakers): [http://youtu.be/82\\_bhD0\\_Trw](http://youtu.be/82_bhD0_Trw)

**Scripture Reading: Mark 1:4-11 [slide 17]**

Rivers are important to us for many reasons in the material sense. But we should always remember that the Jordan River is where God meets us and sets us free. It's where God shows Joshua a Promised Land. It's where God points Jesus to the cross, and where Jesus connects us an eternal promise. In the book of Revelation, we are told that there will be a river of life in the new Jerusalem—a river Jordan renewed and restored beyond imagination.

**Scripture Reading: Revelation 22:1-5 [slide 18]**

The Jordan River Basin is in a state of ecological crisis. This crisis is the fault of bad stewardship. We are called to be caretakers of the planet, stewards of the gifts of God. In this particular case, humans have not been caretakers. They have simply been takers, without any means of replenishing this non-renewable resource. As God has promised a river of life in the new Jerusalem, we are bound by virtue of our baptism to renew and restore the Earth before our natural resources disappear forever.

## QUOTES ABOUT WATER, ECOLOGY, AND CREATION [SLIDES 19-25]

The leader can have the group read through them on the Powerpoint or create a handout and then solicit comments. Quotes from the Sourcebook are marked with a page number.

"...water is, as the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung so often noted, a basic archetypal symbol for new life, fertility, rebirth, and rejuvenation. It functions as such in every religion and in every major belief system."

**Fr. Gregory Collins, p. 20**

"One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover, our God is the same God. You may think now that you own [God] as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. [God] is the God of man, and [God's] compassion is equal for the red man and the white. This earth is precious to [God], and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator."

**Chief Seattle (1780-1866)**

"Water, then, signifies the depth of life and the calling to cosmic transfiguration. It can never be regarded or treated as private property or become the means and end of individual interest. Indifference towards the vitality of water constitutes both a blasphemy to God the Creator and a crime against humanity."

**Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, p. 25**

"The preacher's voice grew soft and musical. 'All the rivers come from that one River and go back to it like it was the ocean sea and if you believe, you can lay your pain in that River and get rid of it because that's the River that was made to carry sin. It's a River full of pain itself, pain itself, moving toward the Kingdom of Christ, to be washed away, slow, you people, slow as this here old red water river round my feet.'"

**From "The River" by Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)**

Fountain of grace, rich, full and free.  
What need I, that is not in thee?  
Full pardon, strength to meet the day,  
And peace which none can take away,  
And peace which none can take away.

**James Edmeston (1791-1867)**

"The initial and crucial response to the environmental crisis is for each of us to bear personal responsibility for the way that we live and for the values that we treasure and priorities that we pursue. To persist in the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is a sin against God and creation."

**Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, p. 26**

"The notion of water as the first mirror makes me think that even today, a community's values are reflected in its water. What are our polluted rivers and streams saying about us?"

**Elena Lloyd-Sidle, p. 34**

## THE JORDAN RIVER AS SYMPTOM OF HUMANITY'S BROKEN-NESS [SLIDE 26]

The ecological crisis facing the Jordan River is emblematic of a much larger, systemic crisis facing the entire planet. Regardless of socio-economic status or nationality, every member of the human species is already feeling the effects of non-renewable resource exploitation, increased carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere, global population growth, ocean acidification, and other global shifts. In short, we're using up the planet, and there's not enough left to "go around."

Note to leader: consider viewing "The Story of Stuff" (approximately 20 min.) at this link: <http://youtu.be/9GorqroiqqM>.

Perhaps the best way we can advocate for the renewal of the Jordan River is not only through our advocacy efforts via groups like Friends of Earth Middle East (<http://www.foeme.org/>), but through making changes in our own lifestyle so as to be better servants. We have to confess that we are not living up to the stewardship standards that are implicit in our baptism, and then work to change our habits and consumption of goods.

We are part of God's creation and charged to reflect God's love and caring for all parts of the creation. How we spend our time, the stuff we accumulate, and the work we pursue defines us, for better or worse.

Since we are at the top of the food chain and nature would flourish without us, our main purpose is to keep the earth out of gratitude, humility, awe and wonder. Restoring the Jordan River can become a starting point for a new understanding of our place in the world and our spiritual calling.

## FROM REALIZATION TO ACTION [SLIDES 27-28]

Consider the concept of a Base Christian Community as a possible model for your action plan. Similar to "cell groups" which are features of the Emergent Church movement in the West, a Base Christian community is a group of people who join together to study the Bible, and then act according to social justice oriented from of Christianity especially popular among the third world and the poor. Since social justice and eco-justice are closely linked, your group can discuss ideas about how they can be better stewards of creation as well as better neighbors to those in need. It's all connected.

The leader can utilize a whiteboard or flipchart to record ideas generated from these discussion questions:

- What kind of qualities does your church community have that are similar to base Christian communities?
- How could your church community adapt to become a fully co-operative Christian community?
- How can people deal with the abdication of personal freedom for the greater good of creation, especially for critical issues like the Jordan River?
- What if being part of a community not only provided for our material needs, but also helped to heal

- the planet, and gave us abundant life in Christ? What would we be willing to sacrifice for this?
- What are some practical steps your group can suggest to the governing body of your church to mobilize for action to help the Jordan River and your own communities?

## FINAL THOUGHTS [SLIDE 29]

- We are called to live in a covenant relationship with the world and Christ.
- We have not kept the covenant— sometimes we come close, but ultimately we have "missed the mark," resulting in ecological crises such as the Jordan River.
- Our missing the mark has set in process the inevitable ecological/economic changes occurring around us.
- We have the gifts and the calling to renew this covenant, and replenish the Jordan.
- We will live out our lives in tension between wanting for ourselves and longing for God, but the only life that can adapt to our new planet is a life based on God's calling for us.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Ask participants to gather around the source of living water, and perhaps a responsive reading of St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun, found on page 33 of the Sourcebook.

Lead the group into a time of prayer, inviting participants to offer up petitions. This time can be accompanied by soft ambient music or silence as preferred. Offer a closing prayer and benediction such as this one:

"May God bless us and keep us.  
May God trouble the waters inside us,  
Until we are moved from complacency to action,  
From ambivalence to compassion,  
From theory to example,  
And from selfish ambition to the betterment of all.  
In the name of the Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

## WEBSITES

- [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org)
- [www.interfaithsustain.com](http://www.interfaithsustain.com)

## DOCUMENTARIES

- Last Call at the Oasis



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## IV. IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Reviving the Jordan River will not be easy. It is a challenge that requires real political commitment from leaders on all sides of the valley.

### **And that's where you come in.**

We need to push this issue up the political agenda – to raise our voices and let Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian decision-makers know that we care about this river and that we expect them to act.

The Jordan River flows through the heart of the Christian tradition, and for that reason its revival is a not simply a question of politics – it is also a moral and spiritual challenge for Christians everywhere. If we want the river to survive, we cannot remain silent.

### **HOW TO JOIN THE CAMPAIGN**

- **Sign the Covenant for the Jordan River.** The

Covenant is a vision statement articulating the Jordan River's outstanding value to humanity. Endorsing the covenant demonstrates commitment to champion the rehabilitation of the Jordan in one's communities and vis a vis the world's decision makers. Join congregations and leaders around the world by endorsing the Covenant for the Jordan River as an individual or community. You'll find the text of the Covenant on the inside back cover of this document.

- **Get together.** Establish a circle of friends, classmates, or co-workers from your community. You might be a group of three or three hundred. It doesn't matter. Together, you can make a difference.
- **Get inspired.** When you've got a group, you need to tell them what happened to the river, why it matters, and what they can do about it. FoEME can provide films, presentations, and fact sheets to help you tell this story.





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- **Identify your target.** You need to let decision-makers know that you care about the river and want them to act. It is crucial to address this message to the right person. If you're in one of the countries that border the river, this might be a mayor or minister. If you're part of a religious congregation, it might be the most senior representative of your community. If you're outside the Middle East, you might need to address your elected representatives, or the national ambassadors from the countries that share the river. You are in the best position to make this call. Discuss it with your group, and come up with the names and addresses of the political, religious, or civil society leaders you are going to approach.
- **Get the message across.** When you know what you want to say and who you want to say it to, you need to decide how to get the message across.

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

### WRITE

Old-fashioned paper mail is more effective than email, and personal, hand-written letters

tend to have more impact than mass-printed campaign blurb. Pictures, poems and postcards can all help your letter to stand out. On our website you'll find sample letters, fact sheets, and stories to help you make the case.

### MEET

Why not invite your representative or leader to a meeting, so s/he can learn more about the issue and start to work with you on the campaign?

### GET NOTICED

Organize a creative, peaceful, attention-grabbing stunt to bring the Jordan River to the attention of political leaders. Remember to invite the local media, and to get your message as clear as possible. FoEME has used this strategy to great effect in the Middle East – you are welcome to contact us for ideas and advice.

### LEARN, CREATE, EXHIBIT

If you are a schoolteacher or faith leader, you may want to design an educational project about the river. This could produce paintings, poems, songs, films, or photos that you can exhibit to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan.

Think about which religious or political leaders – as well as which media outlets – you could invite to such an event. A module of this kind is not only raises environmental consciousness; it can also offer young people an education in global citizenship, grassroots activism, and participation in the democratic process.

### USE YOUR IMAGINATION

These are not the only ways to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan River. Use your imagination. Make some noise. And keep it positive – you'll be more effective if you address political leaders as partners, and ask them to join you in this effort, rather than treating them as an obstacle.

### OTHER WAYS TO HELP

- **Spread the word.** Use your social networks to call for the revival of the Jordan River. Let people know what the problem is, why you care, and what you're doing to help. On our website you'll find videos, photos, and even sample posts to help get the word out – but your own voice is the most powerful. Please tell us what

you're doing via Twitter and Facebook – it helps us build momentum behind the campaign.

- **Invite FoEME to speak to your community.** Get in touch if you would like someone from FoEME to speak to your community about the Jordan River.
- **Come to the river.** If you want to get more deeply involved, organize a journey to see the Jordan River for yourself. FoEME runs eco-parks – ideal places to stay and to learn – on both sides of the valley. A journey like this will equip you with first-hand knowledge that you can use to advocate for the river in your home community. We can also put you in touch with tour operators and local partners (including environmental and faith groups) that'll help make your trip safe and successful.
- **Donate to FoEME.** Without FoEME, the revival of the Jordan River would not even be on the agenda. We need your financial support to continue our campaign. You can donate directly at [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org) or, better still, use your local campaign to raise funds.

## CREDITS

### BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS

All English-language translations of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are taken from the King James Bible, with the exception of the quote on the front cover (Ezekiel 47:6) which comes from the English Standard version.

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The views expressed are those of EcoPeace / FoEME and do not necessarily represent the views of our expert team, contributors, project advisors or reviewers.

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## ABOUT ECOPEACE / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MIDDLE EAST

**EcoPeace/ Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)** is a unique organization at the forefront of the environmental peacemaking movement. As a tri-lateral organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists, our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region. FoEME has offices in Amman, Bethlehem, and Tel-Aviv.

For more information on FoEME or to download any of our publications please visit: [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org)

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