

The Promotion of Interfaith Syncretism and Turning the Church into a Mere Religion Through Ecological Activities*

An Offering of “Sacred Gifts” to “Mother Earth”

I. The “Common Front of All Religions”

Professor Chrestos Yannaras has very aptly pointed out the “*self-serving expediency*” with which “*religion is being used today to enforce an ecological morality.*”

In our days, it is “*environmental threats which justify the coöperation of*

religions in dealing with these threats.” “*Religions have the feeling of being useful once more: ecology ‘sells,’ and concern for the environment guarantees good public relations and international publicity.*”

In this matter, “*the particular danger is that the Orthodox Church gives the impression of participating with pride in this ecological utilitarianism,*” thereby, however, showing that it is capitulating to the process of turning the Christian experience into a mere religion.

Furthermore, this “*coöperation*” also means participation in the preparation for a “*world religion,*” by means of the strengthening of the “*common front of all religions*” against the “*common enemy,*” secularism, ostensibly to safeguard “*basic religious values.*”

With regard to the Orthodox ecumenists, it is well known that Patriarch Bartholomew thinks and acts as the undisputed “*leader*” of interfaith dia-



logue, constantly proclaiming the need “*for the peaceful coöperation of religions,*” so long as “*we are united in the spirit of one God.*”

II. In Katmandu, Nepal

Under these conditions, representatives of the eleven major religions gathered in Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, in November of 2000, for the **Thirty-ninth International Congress** of the *World Wildlife Fund* (W.W.F.), in collaboration with the *Alliance of Religions and Conservation* (A.R.C.), “*for the purpose of inciting millions of Faithful to take part in the conservation of the earth’s natural resources.*”

“On 15 November, representatives of the religions of Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism met in Katmandu, Nepal, to confront a broad spectrum of international environmental challenges and to reveal their ‘Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet’—that is, their initiatives to promote a sense of responsibility for, and preservation of, the environment.”

Christians were represented in Katmandu by Anglicans, Lutherans, Maronites, Roman Catholics, and, unfortunately, **Orthodox ecumenists.**

Present and participating was **Patriarch Bartholomew**, who was the principal speaker at the Congress.

During the **special ceremony** “*Journey to Katmandu: Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet,*” the Representatives of the various religions offered twenty-six symbolic “*gifts*” to “*Mother Earth,*” which were collected by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and President of the W.W.F. International.

Patriarch Bartholomew offered a tract of monastery property in the Dodecanese.

The **King of Nepal**, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Der—who is believed to be the incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu—proclaimed the opening of the ceremony.

An **interfaith** celebration followed in honor of the new “*Sacred Gifts,*” with music, dancing, and sacred ceremonies from all over the world.

“Programmed for the first day of the gatherings, with the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, was a ceremonial performance according to the religious ritual of the Shintoists, during which time relevant Shintoist blessings were offered to nature and to man. On the afternoon of the same day, blessings were offered according to the Zoroastrian ritual.”

♦ It was noted that “*many aspects of these activities run the risk of slipping into syncretistic theories and practices.*” But beyond this inoffensive “spe-

cious alarmism,” it is **absolutely certain** that the participation of Orthodox **ecumenists** in these gatherings already constitutes a **relativization** of the **Sole Truth** and, to be sure, a *de facto* **syncretism**. And this, because the presuppositions and perspectives of **interfaith hobnobbing** are “*effective tools*” towards turning the Church into a religion and disfiguring the historical-eschatological Body of Christ “*into a worldly or social religion, with a utilitarian or self-serving character.*” This disfiguration makes the Church “*a part of the world or a value of civilization,*” that is, it secularizes it; this, however, also constitutes a “*true heresy.*”

“The heresy—not merely a sin—which preëminently and primarily threatens the mystical and mysteriological depths of the Church is secularism.” □

→ See [Father] **Alexander Schmemmann**, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), pp. 107-110; **Chrestos Yannaras**, “Οἰκολογία καὶ θρησκεία” [“Ecology and Religion”], **Καθημερινή** (Sunday 23 November 1997); **Father Michael S. Kardamakis**, *Οἱ πειρασμοὶ τῆς Ἱστορίας καὶ ἡ μαρτυρία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας* [*The Temptations of History and the Witness of the Church*] (Athens: “Harmos” Publications, 2001); **Hieromonk Klemes Agiokyprianites**, *The Contribution of the Orthodox Ecumenists to the Interfaith Venture and Their Responsibility for It* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2000); **Kathryn-Jane Muller-Griffiths**, “World’s Faiths in Katmandu Unveil ‘Sacred Gifts’ to Protect Environment,” **ENI** (Geneva), No. 22 (29 November 2000), pp. 15-16; “Οἰκολογία καὶ Νέα Ἐποχὴ” [“Ecology and the New Age”], **Παρακαταθήκη** (Thessaloniki), No. 15 (November December 2000), pp. 13-14.

*Source: Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐνημέρωσις, No. 37 (July 2001), p. 157.