It is with particular satisfaction and personal joy that we welcome this publication, being originally the fruit of an innovative conference held from October 25–28, 2007, in California, at the St. Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Center of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, for the purpose of gathering Orthodox thinkers from a variety of disciplines and range of backgrounds in order to explore scholarly perspectives of our relationship toward the natural environment.

As is well known, this topic has been of urgent concern and spiritual priority to the Ecumenical Patriarchate since at least the mid-1980s and, more especially, during our tenure since 1991. We have spared no effort whatsoever in endeavoring to raise popular awareness—both within the Orthodox Church worldwide as well as within the broader community globally, across religious and disciplinary divides—on the sacredness of material creation, formed out of nothing by our loving Creator and offered to humanity as a sacrament of communion and thanksgiving, but also on the sinful abuse of its natural resources by human beings who, over the centuries, have demonstrated a sense of arrogance and failed to recognize when enough is enough.

Throughout our international conferences with theologians and scientists, our political conversations with world leaders, and our encyclical communications with Orthodox faithful, we have emphasized the liturgical, iconic, and ascetic dimensions of the divine command and human vocation for the prayerful preservation and needful protection of the natural environment. Nevertheless, it has always been our foremost expectation and fervent hope alike that communities throughout the world would gradually
assume responsibility for this crucial matter on the regional and parochial but also on the local and personal levels.

In this respect, we appreciate in particular the collective concern of the academic community and welcome with profound pleasure this unique volume edited by Archdeacon John Chryssavgis and Dr. Bruce Foltz, bringing together voices from Orthodox communities throughout the world in perhaps the most comprehensive exploration of environmental theology of our time. It is our sincere and firm conviction that members of the scholastic community are, perhaps in a unique and even unprecedented manner, able to provide invaluable insights and influential incentives to the wider community with regard to the limitless treasures of the philosophical, patristic, and prophetic tradition of our Church.

This volume documents and expands on the effort initiated at the conference in 2007, with the additional participation and inclusion of leading spokespersons on the subject over the last decades. The areas of concentration are as varied as the contributors themselves, spanning such disciplines as theology and epistemology, religion and science, philosophy and poetry, ethics and morality, liturgy and doctrine, phenomenology and technology.

It is our fervent prayer that this book will prove truly beneficial, awakening the conscience and planting seeds in the hearts of numerous people and diverse institutions around the world for many years to come.

✠ Bartholomew

Archbishop of Constantinople–New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch