



# CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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*Insights from the Eastern Monastic Tradition*

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## *Insights from the Eastern Monastic Tradition*

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### ➤ **Fourth and Fifth Century Egypt**

- St Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of St Antony*
- St Sarapion of Thmuis, *Letter to the Monks*
- *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

### ➤ **Sixth and Seventh Century Palestine**

- John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*
- St Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Life of St Mary the Egyptian* and *The Theophany Prayers*
- St Maximus the Confessor, *The Book of Difficulties*

## *Fourth and Fifth Century Egypt*

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- **St Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of St Antony* 49-50**
  - Antony desired to move farther away from people, to the Inner Mountain
  - “...he came to a very high mountain, and at the foot of the mountain ran a clear spring whose waters were sweet and very cold; outside there was a plain and a few uncared-for palm trees. Antony then ... moved by God, loved the place...”
  - Antony began to till the soil and soon got crops that spared his disciples the effort of bringing him food and, also, enabled him to offer hospitality to his visitors

## *Fourth and Fifth Century Egypt*

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### ➤ **St Sarapion of Thmuis, *Letter to the Monks***

- Due to the monks' ascetic efforts and prayerfulness, God blesses the world through them
- “The deserts are being exalted through you and the inhabited world is saved by your prayers. The rain is sent down upon the earth by your supplications. ... The river ... makes known the power of your supplications. ... Therefore the city of Alexandria is blessed for having you as mediators.”

## *Fourth and Fifth Century Egypt*

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### ➤ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

- Anthony 36 (restraint conditions one's mastery of wild animals)
- Bessarion 1–4 (the environment, particularly waters, at the service of the saints)
- John the Dwarf 1 (the desert, signified by a dry wooden stick, becomes paradise, signified by the return to life of the dry wood, through the patient caretaking of the saint)
- Macarius the Great 2 (two ascetics lived in peace with the animals in a paradisaal oasis)
- Xoius 2 (the saint brings rain during a drought through prayer)

## *Sixth and Seventh Century Palestine*

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### ➤ **John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow***

- The title as it features in *Patrologia Graeca*—*The Meadow*, which presents the narrative of the heavenly rose garden by way of [saints'] luxuriantly blooming lives
- The prologue reiterates the message of the title, associating the beauty of a meadow in spring and the virtues of the Palestinian ascetics
- A particular form of environmentalism—the grazer monks (e.g. 19, 21, 84, 129)
- Stories of combat (e.g. 18, 58, 83, 124, 125) and coexistence (e.g. 2, 107, 157, 163, 167) that involve animals, particularly lions, and the environment
- The monk as providential agent (184). An elder “would rise early and feed all the dogs at the lavra. He would give flour to the small ants, grain to the bigger ones. He would dampen biscuits and throw them up on the roof-tops for the birds to eat.”

## *Sixth and Seventh Century Palestine*

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- **St Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Life of St Mary the Egyptian* and *The Theophany Prayers***
  - *Life of St Mary the Egyptian* 39-40—a lion helped Abba Zosimas to bury the body of St Mary in the hard soil of the desert
  - *The Theophany Prayers*—a detailed contemplation of the environmental effects of the Lord’s baptism in Jordan—“Today the waters of the Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today the whole universe is watered by mystical streams. ... Today paradise has been opened to humankind, and the Sun of righteousness has shone upon us. ... Today the darkness of the world vanishes with the appearance of our God. Today all of creation is illumined from on high. ... Today the celestial beings celebrate with those on earth, and earthly beings commune with those in heaven. ... Today the land and the sea have divided the joy of the world between them, and the world is filled with rejoicing. ... Jordan turned back and the mountains shouted with joy as they beheld God in the flesh, and the clouds resounded with wonder at seeing Him Who comes, Who is Light of Light, true God of true God, drowning the death of sin, the thorn of error and the bond of hades in the Jordan, thereby granting unto the world the baptism of salvation.”

## *Sixth and Seventh Century Palestine*

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- **St Maximus the Confessor, *The Book of Difficulties* 41**
  - A holistic representation of reality based on the wisdom of the saints
  - Reality unfolds by way of five polarities (uncreated & created—unseen & visible—sky & earth—paradise & land—male & female)
  - Reality on its way to coherent complexity by way of five syntheses
  - Unification made possible by natural (the human being as point of convergence; the connections linking the fundamental principles) and ascetic (saintly life, virtue, love) factors
  - Christ “as a human being” brings the universe to unity by transforming the whole into “another human being”