

THE WORLD AS SACRAMENT

The Theological and Spiritual Vision of Creation:

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

ST. ANTHONY OF EGYPT DESCRIBES nature as a book that reveals the beauty of God's creation: "Creation [he says] declares in a loud voice its Maker and master." Or, as St. Maximus the Confessor claims in the 7th century, the whole world is a "cosmic liturgy." What, then, is the Orthodox theological and spiritual vision of the world?

As a young child, accompanying the priest of our local village to remote chapels on our native island of Imvros in Turkey, the connection of the beautiful mountainside to the splendor of God was evident. The environment provides a panoramic vision of the world, like the wide-angle lens of a camera, which prevents us from exploiting its natural resources in a selfish way. The recent ecological disaster off the Gulf Coast in Louisiana reveals the consequences of ignoring this cosmic worldview.

However, to reach this point of maturity toward the natural environment, we must take the time to listen to the voice of creation. If we are silent, we shall experience what the Liturgy of St. James affirms: *The heavens declare the glory of heaven; the earth proclaims the sovereignty of God; the sea heralds the authority of the Lord; and every creature preaches the magnificence of God.*

It is unfortunate that we lead our life without noticing the environmental concert that is playing out before our eyes and ears. In this orchestra, each minute detail plays a critical role. Nothing can be removed without the entire symphony being affected. No tree, animal or fish can be removed without the entire picture being distorted, if not destroyed.

In its foremost symbol, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Orthodox Church confesses "one God, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." From this fundamental principle and declaration of faith, the Orthodox Church articulates the concept of cosmic transfiguration, especially through its hymnography. The Feast of Christ's Transfiguration on August 6th highlights

the integral connection between metamorphosis and theophany, extending the divine light and transformative power to all creation: *Today, on Mt. Tabor, in the manifestation of your light, O Lord, You were unaltered from the light of the unbegotten Father. We have seen the Father as light, and the Spirit as light, guiding with light the entire creation.*

And the Feast of our Lord's Baptism on January 6th proclaims: *The nature of waters is sanctified, the earth is blessed, and the heavens are enlightened ... so that by the elements of creation, and by angels, and by human beings, by things both visible and invisible, God's most holy name may be glorified.*

The breadth and depth of the Orthodox cosmic vision implies that humanity is a part of a "theophany," which is always greater than any single individual. As St. Maximus states: "Human beings are not isolated from the rest of creation. They are bound by their very nature to the whole of creation." Thus, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky urges: *Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. 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.*

In order to achieve this sacramental vision of creation, human beings are called to practice a spirituality of thanksgiving and self-discipline. In theological terms, we are called to be "eucharistic" and "ascetic" beings. In this way, the Orthodox Church reminds us that creation is not simply our possession or property, but rather a gift from God the Creator, a gift of wonder and beauty. From the moment of creation, this world was offered by God as a gift to be returned in gratitude and love.

This is precisely how the Orthodox spiritual way avoids the problem of the world's domination by humanity. For if this world is a sacred mystery, then this in itself precludes any attempt at mastery by human beings. Indeed, the mastery or exploitative control of the world's resources is identified

INFORMATION

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more with Adam's "original sin" than with God's wonderful gift. It is the result of selfishness and greed, which arise from alienation from God and an abandonment of the sacramental worldview. Sin separated the sacred from the secular, dismissing the latter to the domain of evil and surrendering it as prey to exploitation.

Beyond a "eucharistic" spirituality, we are also called to practice an "ascetic ethos," namely self-restraint and self-control, so that we no longer willfully consume every fruit, but instead manifest a sense of frugality from some things for the sake of valuing all things. Then, we shall learn to care for plants and animals, for trees and rivers, for mountains and seas, for all human beings and the world. Then, we shall be instruments of peace and life, not tools of violence and death. Then, everything will assume its divine purpose, as God originally intended the world.

On the sixth day of creation, God created man and woman in His divine image and likeness. Yet, what most people overlook is that the sixth day is not dedicated to the formation of Adam alone. That sixth day was shared with "living creatures of every kind; cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth." (Gen. 1.24) This close connection between humanity and the rest of creation is a powerful reminder of our intimate relationship with the environment. While there is undoubtedly something unique about our creation in God's image, there is more that unites us than separates us, not only as human beings but also with creation. It is a lesson we have learned the hard way in recent decades. The saints of our Church understood this well. They knew that a person with a pure heart was able to sense the connection with the rest of creation, including the animal world. The connection is not merely emotional; it is profoundly spiritual, providing a sense of continuity and community as well as an

expression of identity and compassion with all of creation. One may recall St. Seraphim of Sarov feeding the bear in the forests of the north. As Abba Isaac of Nineveh observed: *A merciful heart burns with love for all creation: for human beings, birds, beasts, even demons – for all God's creatures. When it recalls these creatures, it is filled with tears. An overwhelming compassion makes the heart grow small and weak, and it cannot endure to hear or see any suffering, even the slightest pain, inflicted upon any creature.*

If the earth is sacred, then our relationship with the natural environment is sacramental. The "sin of Adam" is precisely his refusal to receive the world as a gift of communion with God and with the rest of creation. St. Paul clearly emphasizes the consequences of the Fall, claiming that "from the beginning till now, the entire creation, which as we know has been groaning in pain" (Rom. 8.22), also "awaits with eager longing this revelation by the children of God." (Rom. 8.19)

However, far too long have we focused – as churches and as theologians – on the notion of sin as a rupture in individual relations with each other or with God. The environmental crisis reminds us of the cosmic consequences of sin, which are more than merely social or narrowly spiritual. Every act of pollution is an offence against God as creator. Repentance implies a radical change of ways and worldview. Some fifteen years ago, at a conference in Santa Barbara, we declared: *To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. To cause*

species to become extinct and destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing climate change; to strip the earth of its natural forests or destroy its wetlands; to contaminate the earth's waters – all of these are sins. Orthodox theology recognizes the natural creation as inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity; every human action leaves a lasting imprint on the body of the earth. Human attitudes and behavior toward creation directly reflect human attitudes and behavior toward other people. Ecology is inevitably related to economy; our global economy is simply outgrowing the capacity of our planet to support it. At stake is not just our ability to sustain the world, but to survive. Indeed, scientists estimate that those most hurt by global warming will be those who can least afford it. Therefore, the ecological problem of pollution is connected to the social problem of poverty; for all ecological activity is measured by its impact upon other people, especially the poor. Concern, then, for ecological issues is directly related to concern for issues of social justice. A Church that neglects to pray for the polluted environment is a Church that refuses to offer food and drink to a suffering humanity. A society that refuses to care for human beings is a society that ultimately mistreats all of God's creation. The terms "ecology" and "economy" share the same etymological root (from the Greek *ikos*), which signifies "home." It is unfortunate and selfish that we have restricted the application of this word to ourselves, as if we were the sole inhabitants of this world. This planet is the home of everyone, of every animal creature, as well as of every form of life.

We have repeatedly stated that the crisis that we are facing in our world is not primarily ecological. It is a crisis concerning the way we perceive the world. We are treating our planet in a selfish, godless manner precisely because we fail to see it as a gift inherited from above; it is our obligation to receive, respect and return this gift to future generations. Therefore, before we can effectively deal with problems of our environment, we must change the way we regard the world. Otherwise, we are simply dealing with symptoms, not with their causes. We require "a new heavenly" worldview if we are to desire "a new earth." (Rev. 21.1) This is the source of our optimism. The natural environment – the forest, water and land – belongs to all generations. Your generation is entitled to a better, brighter world; a world free from degradation, violence and bloodshed; a world of generosity and love. It is the selfless love for our children that will show us the path to the future. And it is your generation that will initiate the changes in lifestyle to secure this future. May God bless you in this sacred struggle. ✠

ABOUT DYING AND FUNERALS: When an Orthodox Christian is dying, the priest is called to come to hear the last confession and give the last Holy Communion. The "Prayers of the Departure of the Soul from the Body" are also done at the bedside (hopefully, before the person becomes unconscious). Upon death, a short memorial is sung by the priest and a chanter and the family at the bedside. Psalms are then read. The coroner is called to verify the death. Church members may be called to wash, anoint and clothe the person (note the similarity to baptism). The departed will be placed in a coffin (with dry ice) and brought to the church. Funeral homes are not always necessary. However, when a funeral home is called to take care of the reposed (usually Daniel's Chapel of the Roses), our *Parish Myrrhbearers* go to the funeral home to wash, anoint and clothe the reposed. Please note: embalming is not necessary, nor is it recommended for Orthodox Christians. If burial is to take place within three or at most four days of death, 99% of the time it is not necessary to embalm the body (embalming is a rather demeaning invasion of the integrity of the body). It must be emphatically stated as well, that the Tradition of the Church – and the love, care, honor, anointing, dressing, prayers and Divine Service which are done over the body of a departed Orthodox Christian – *completely preclude cremation*. Nevertheless, some folks have chosen cremation over burial, for various reasons, most often having to do with expense. Funerals and burials will never be cheap, but they need not be high-priced either – we have choices. Our deep reverence for the human body – living or dead – should make us stop and think that we must not to be produced by the economics of the funeral industry, but instead, be governed by our theology and Holy Tradition.

MONEY WORRIES?

WITH NO GLENDI THIS YEAR, our parish will lose about \$30,000 of income. How to recoup such a large amount? What's possible for us? Should we worry? Many of us have lots of ideas for fund-raisers and have spent lots of time discussing those ideas. When all the suggestions have been made, and plans outlined, we still have to ask ourselves: is this what we are supposed to be doing? Should we – members of the Church – be worried about fundraising?

Generally, churches whose members practice a form of *Proportional Giving* or *Tithing* – i.e., Christian Stewardship, do not worry about recouping \$30,000 of lost income, nor do they worry about how to fund missions and evangelism, charitable giving, youth programs, fresco painting, bell towers, baptismal fonts, etc., along with the expense of running a parish. In such parishes, the focus is on doing God's work in our sorrowful world, charity, worship and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Churches that practice limited or no *Proportional Giving* generally spend a lot of time and effort worrying and holding fundraisers. Thanks be to God, our parish is somewhere in the middle when it comes to tithing. Some members regularly give, some infrequently, some do not. So, while the topic of Christian stewardship has been discussed in past bulletins frequently, and considering our present circumstances of canceling Glendi 2011, it can't hurt to make a few comments on practicing good Christian Stewardship.

Christian Stewardship is the practice of systematic and proportionate giving of time, talent and treasure, based on the conviction these three things are a trust from God given to each person, to be wisely used in service for the benefit of all people, in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love and care for us. Conviction, service, gratitude.

In other words, we give a proportion, a percentage, of what God has given us, as St. Paul said to do: "Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him." (I Cor. 16:2). If we have wealth, we give a percentage (be it 2, 5 or 10%) out of that wealth to concretely

demonstrate our gratitude to Jesus Christ. If we have little to give, we still give out of that little for the same reasons, and the Lord will increase it as only He can do.

Stewardship is not a once a year event; not all about money, or dues, or fund-raising or even meeting our annual budget. Stewardship is about making choices, as individuals and in a community. It's about being faithful disciples, caring for and managing all God has given us: the commitment of time, talent and treasure. Our financial resources are blessings from God. How we manage those finances can help us escape the trap of anxiety (and often selfishness). Failing to manage those resources finds us anxious and distracted when it comes to our faith.

Two more points to consider: *Proportional Giving* does not leave out anyone at all. All should participate, and all will benefit from the blessings of returning a small percentage back to God what He has given us. This is true whether one is rich, or poor, or just getting by – success in a parish is judged **not** by how much money is brought in, but by how much we trust God and are grateful to Him. The "Widow's Mite" of the Gospel of Matthew speaks eloquently: Jesus "looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.""

Finally, we must remember that giving to the Church is not a form of charity. By no means; for God does not need our money, nor our time nor our talents. He has all things, and providentially uses them for the good of His People. More rightly, the Church is God's charity toward us – therefore we joyfully, responsibly and honestly give out of gratitude to Him, understanding that He brings us into His Divine plans for our benefit and to serve others.
– Fr. Lawrence

Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly in this manner? For all things come from Thee, and from Thine own have we given Thee. (1 Chronicles 29:13-14)

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **ST SERAPHIM WEEK** is a four day, summer program for kids (ages 5–10) being organized by Gloria Collins and Lara Anderson. Daily schedule here at the church will consist of a morning prayer at 9 AM sharp, followed by a brief spiritual lesson with one of the priests, then crafts, games, snacks, folk dancing, music, and a wrap-up prayer at Noon. **Dates:** Monday, June 27 thru Thursday, June 30. Registration forms will be available at the Candle-desk in the next few weeks.
- **THE MONASTERY OF THE ASSUMPTION IN CALISTOGA** invites all to the Friends' Meeting on Sunday, June 5, to hear a talk by Father John Finley. Fr. John, who is a member of the Missions & Evangelism Dept., Antiochian Archdiocese, will speak about "Funeral Practices in Modern America in light of Orthodox Theology of the Body." His talk will begin at 4 PM, followed by Vespers at 5 PM and a potluck dinner at 6 PM. Fr. John's talk about funeral practices is timely. Quite literally, this is a topic that affects everyone.
- **FATHER LAWRENCE** and family will be away on vacation from June 20 until late on July 2.
- **FORT ROSS:** Plan to attend the always moving and beautiful Divine Liturgy at Fort Ross on July 4, starting at 10 AM. Our Parish is now responsible for setting up the chapel for the Liturgy, providing all the Liturgical items (icons, chalice, covers, etc.) and providing a choir. It's only natural that we should also provide the congregation! After Liturgy there will be a pot-luck picnic lunch.
- **GLENDI 2012:** The 2012 is not a typo. Let me explain. Our hall expansion and storage building construction work is expected to be in full swing by the time you read this. However, we had expected two months ago that we would have already been well underway with the project. Our Glendi organizational team met recently, and it became clear to the group that, without a kitchen, without space for trash dumpsters or the reefer truck, and having much of the church grounds an active construction zone—Glendi would not be possible. Not even a smaller Glendi, as the expenses for parking, buses, advertising and entertainment would be far greater than any hoped for income. Besides the stress of construction and its costs, the many known and unknown hurdles make hosting a 2011 Glendi impossible. The committee did acknowledge that Glendi must be kept alive for us and in the public's eye. When the new Hall is finished, we will host a true—but small—Glendi to entertain the friends of our parish and to bring in some funds. We will all miss the fun of Glendi, but with the construction of the the Hall and storage building and the landscaping improvements we will have ample excitement. Next year, with our bigger Hall, a new and efficient kitchen, easy storage facilities, more pleasant grounds and less stressful time constraints we will be able to make GLENDI 2012 the best ever. We have sufficient time to plan, that's for sure. —Fr. Lawrence
- **PENTECOST:** Sunday, June 12, 50 days after Pascha, we celebrate the Great Feast of Pentecost—the giving of the Holy Spirit. Vigil will be served on Saturday, July 11, at 5 PM. Prior to Vigil—starting about 3 PM— we will be decorating the Church with greenery, shrubs, and flowers. If you can help, please see any of the flower team (Patricia Krueger, Denise Pellizzer, Katherine Crawford, Kate Willens). Liturgy for Pentecost begins at 10 AM, followed IMMEDIATELY by Vespers with its three long and unique Prayers of Kneeling. Pot-luck lunch to follow. To recap: Sat., June 11, 3 PM, decorate the Church / 5 PM, Vigil / Sunday, June 12, 10 AM, Divine Liturgy / followed by Kneeling Vespers / Potluck luncheon—please bring a dish to share.
- **UPCOMING TALKS ON SPIRITUAL MATTERS:** Vincent Rossi will deliver two talks on the Holy Spirit: Wednesday, June 15 after Vespers and Wednesday, June 29, the Feast of St. Peter & Paul, again, after Vespers. During July and August there will be classes/discussions every other Wednesday evening, unless there is a Church Service.
- A new "Study Group" will meet on Tuesdays in July and August at 7 PM, at 1352 Oak View Circle, Rohnert Park, 3rd floor conference room. Call Debi Shrimplin at (707) 536-9112 for more info. The Group will meet with either Fr. Lawrence or one of our other clergy/teachers, to study the Bible and the writings of the Holy Fathers.

LAST DAY OF CHURCH SCHOOL: *Sunday, June 5.* Parents are asked to join their children in their church school classes this Sunday. Please come up with your kids as they venerate the Cross, so you can follow them to class. Following class, the children will be able to celebrate: hotdogs, corn on the cob, ice cream, games and a jumphouse will be provided.

Parish Council Meeting Minutes - Thursday, May 5, 2011

We began with the singing of "Christ is Risen" at 7:07 pm. Attending: Fr. Lawrence Margitich, Serge Anderson, Bonnie Alexander, Lew Baer, Debbie Buse, Gary Collins, Petar Griovski, Ole Kern, Nick Nicholson Tom Pellizzer, Xenia Pribyl (Sisterhood President) Absent: Preston Booker and Sergei Moroz.

1. March 29, 2011 meeting minutes were accepted as submitted.
2. Rector's Report:
 - a. Thanks expressed to all for their work during Holy Week;
 - b. Mother's Day – special litany at the end. Asked if anyone wanted to do a special Mother's Day lunch;
 - c. Commented that when we have BBQs for the Sunday Agape meal, we need to make sure there is a cleanup crew committed to seeing it through. Loads of garbage outside after the last Agape;
 - d. Fr. Andrew – ending his internship this month; rather than end of June. Petar pointed out a math error from Diocese. We would like to support him through July and need the diocese to contribute. Fr Lawrence will look into the error.
 - e. Father Lawrence will be going on vacation June 19 (PM)-July 2 (only gone one Sunday).
3. Treasurers' Report – Statement of January, 2011:
 - a. March was a good month;
 - b. Discussion of various report formatting changes.
4. Grounds and Facilities Report / Building Maintenance list / Immediate and future maintenance projects: Domes for Protection bell tower, main dome & cross – at Serge's shop ; Replacement Solar inverters – Finished; Waterproof area around upper 2nd story-altar window – Creative Roofing is giving us an estimate; Baptismal Font Landscaping – Ideas were proposed regarding grading the lawn to the concrete. Father will speak with the landscape committee keeping the end-product of the construction project in mind.
5. Old Business:
 - a. Construction Details and General Report. The building permit is delayed because the septic permit is not completed. This puts us six weeks behind schedule before we begin! Testing tentatively scheduled next Tuesday.
 - b. Artist's rendition coming soon.
 - c. Gazebo Reinstallation – New foundation for the Gazebo closer to Protection church will be taken care when the construction equipment is here. Need to make a form for the concrete base.
 - d. Trailer Upgrade Status: Almost finished; thermo-coupler in stove needs replacing. Electricity plugged into solar field. Water is coming from the duplex well. Septic is being worked on.
 - e. Play Equipment: Nick Nicholson reported he is developing three recommendations for discussion with parents; price ranges from \$10,000-60,000. Serge recommends pea gravel rather than wood chips under the equipment. Target date: Selection by July meeting.
 - f. Removal of Old Equipment – Preston volunteered at a past meeting to manage this task.
 - g. Storing Kitchen/Hall Items; Target Date for Move to Portable and get port-a-potties, Target date: arbitrarily July 1.
 - h. Glendi: Meeting on Sunday resulted in decision to cancel Glendi this year due to construction. When the new hall is finished, we can have a bazaar, bake and craft sale and perhaps a Glendi type dinner.
6. New Business:
 - a. Duplex – Lew reports that the duplex needs a lot of work. Thanks expressed to Lew for his time and efforts put into the duplex.
7. Next meeting will be Thursday, May 26, 2011. Meeting adjourned with "Shine, Shine" at 8:13 PM.