

Being a »New Creation«

Challenges, Visions and Signs of Hope¹

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Ever since the Vancouver Assembly 1983 the attention of the World Council of Churches has been focused on »Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation«, a conciliar process which has given the ecumenical movement a new elan, has significantly stimulated discussion about the unity of the Church and has challenged theologians and the WCC member and non-member churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, to take their own stand on this issue.

This promising development, however, also displays some draw-backs. The discussion about the present meaning of creation and its integrity or the diverse issue of the Covenant, »the conciliar process of mutual commitment«² and its doctrinal and social understanding in our times, is gradually succumbing to the threat of becoming a strict dogmatic reaction meant to be conducted exclusively by theologians thinking only in terms of their own international church perspectives in view of their traditions and teachings. The lion's share of attention has been directed toward the conciliar process that, given the concrete concern for the threatened environment, it is true to have a powerful wind in its sails.

The JPIC discussion in terms of its diverse and complex character has become, especially during the last five years increasingly burdened with this handicap. Under these circumstances the Seoul Convocation in 1990, where theological reflection and discussion brought the whole issue and concerns to a real »imbroglio« and where one was unable to reach an ecumenical consensus, was also under pressure for speedy results in decisions by the churches and complete commitment to the JPIC vision and goal.

On the other hand, the world at large, with its threats to life, shows particular interest today in ecological issues such as environmental concerns, pollution, deforestation, poverty, hunger, etc. However the churches did not place these issues seriously among their priorities or feel at least challenged by the JPIC concerns.

In spite of the promising developments of the Vancouver Assembly (1983) and the encouragement and endorsement of Canberra (1991), JPIC has not yet resulted in an integ-

¹ The main purpose of the following pages is not to repeat what has already been said or written on various occasions from an Orthodox point of view concerning the JPIC issue, but rather to explore new areas of challenges, offering new insights which have not yet been reflected or discussed and which should be a substantial contribution to the continuing JPIC process. On the other hand we have avoided to reflect once more on the traditional concepts which emerged in the JPIC process during the recent years, i.e. conciliarity, the theology of creation, covenant, covenanting, etc.

² Cf. the Statement of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox representatives and participants in the Seoul Convocation, 1990, which strongly expressed their concerns on the issues of »covenant«, »covenanting« and »renewing our covenant with God«.

rated discussion concerning the issues of the theology of creation (conducted mainly by »Church and Society«) and the theology of the sacraments, which is taking place exclusively in Faith and Order. Thus not much has been achieved even regarding the expectation that ecumenical agreement in the areas of baptism, eucharist and ministry would also bear fruit in a broader discussion among the faithful about the problems confronting them in their daily ecclesial life and work. In this respect it is striking that in the joint consultation on creation in Dublin (1988) an attempt was in fact made to establish a relation between the JPIC Programme and the Faith and Order study project on »Confessing the One Faith«³, but unfortunately no follow-up or substantial collaboration were reached⁴.

From the point of view of the high expectation following the Vancouver Assembly, this is an extremely disappointing development which churches and theologians have, in particular, expressed after the Seoul Convocation, especially as the JPIC Programme also led to considerable financial difficulties and implications for the churches and the WCC in particular.

Is it not time after almost 45 years in the history of the WCC in particular, to try to change this ecumenical maximalistic and triumphalistic way and attitude of projecting and dealing with programmes of which several in their process have either collapsed or were completely abandoned, others were re-oriented or at least never reached their concrete goal and remained unfinished? Why did the governing bodies never take seriously the lessons of the ecumenical past in order to discuss and maybe to review their programmatic policies on the decision-making process? Is it not the time that the ecumenical movement »comes down to earth« and realizes in a concrete and pragmatic way that the church unity issue has been driven very far from its initial priority, goal and vision even though the ecumenical movement and the WCC member churches have attempted several times to refresh their vision, but they were unable to keep the »flame« of its ecumenical memories, commitment and its pioneers' contribution alive? But there is hope, and it has to be said that the ecumenical movement has contributed in many areas and helped the churches to grow up ecumenically and challenged them to enter into the ecclesial unity process.

The conversations at Seoul, as well as its main results, were much criticized not only by Orthodox participants but later on also by theologians, Protestants in particular. There was a general worldwide feeling that the Convocation was firstly not well prepared, and WCC member churches in particular felt that for such an international gathering the utmost should have been done; secondly, Seoul's theology was irrelevant and resolutions, reflections and affirmations, proposed in a concrete or a very naive way, were mainly based on the horizontal secularized ethic of classical humanism.

Perhaps the theologians will have to do better, as Nietzsche used to say. In the Tradition of the Church they will find adequate material, but about which Tradition are we

³ Cf. D. Gosling — G. Limouris (Ed.), *Creation and the Kingdom of God* (Consultation with Faith and Order), *Church and Society Document* 89, Geneva 1988.

⁴ Cf. Martien E. Brinkmann, *Creation and Sacrament*, *Exchange* 19:3 (1990) 205.

talking? Where is a common consensus of the different Christian confessions and denominations on the issue? It still needs to be studied and elaborated further.

For Christian hope, though it must seem utopian to common sense, is not problematical. And though it is »evidence of things unseen«, it is not revelation of static truth, but a revolutionary dynamic. It overturns this world's verdicts because it is based on divine, not human, humanism. God sees »man« (anthropos) deified. Man is God's »co-liturgos« in a common work: »He who believes in me will do the work I do, and he will do even greater« (Jn 14:12). It is not a question of miracles but of something more than a miracle — the justice of God struggling to overcome the dehumanization of the world, poverty, hunger and death.

The justice of God calls for a word from the Church. Proclaiming, as it does, imperatives of conscience, only the Church can give a soul to economic development, and development can serve spiritual values as well. As Berdiaev, the Russian philosopher, used to say: »Bread for me is a material question, bread for my neighbour is a spiritual question.«

Hence the Orthodox contribution to and their task in the JPIC process was to draw a social ecclesiology out of the biblical tradition and the Church Fathers, and to try to theologize the three areas through its lived and experienced ecclesial life into Tradition.⁵

The Church of Christ, being not of this world, but abiding *in* and *for* the world, cannot remain outside the events and be indifferent⁶ to tragic situations and to the ecological changes taking place in it. Contemporary life sets diverse questions to which the Church has to respond, basing itself on Holy Scriptures and ecclesial Tradition by making use of developments in theology. Among many of the events experienced daily is the problem of the interconnectedness of humanity with surrounding nature which lately is drawing general attention to the catastrophic consequences of the exploitation of the world's resources and environmental pollution.

Today one of the fundamental causes of the ecological crisis is usually said to be the incursion into Nature of the highly developed scientific and technological civilization of Western society.

The aspiration of human beings to master Nature was restrained — researchers presume — not only because of the insufficient development of science and technology, but also because of psychological barriers.

The real difficulty in today's economic and social problems is that they can only be solved by recourse to a spiritual principle.

When the Patristic period analyzed the conceptions of justice or peace in relation to God's divine act of creation for the sake of the whole humanity, it must have been struck

⁵ G. Limouris (Ed.), *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Insights from Orthodoxy*, Geneva 1990. This volume includes reports and papers presented at two Inter-Orthodox Consultations in preparation of the Seoul Convocation (Sofia/Bulgaria 1987 — Minsk/USSR 1989).

⁶ Cf. *Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I.*, *On the Day of the Protection of the Environment*, Phanar 1989, Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis, Gland/Switzerland 1990, pp. 3–4: »In view of this (world) situation, the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved ... we paternally urge ... all the faithful in the World to admonish themselves and their children to respect and protect the natural environment, and all who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing the nations to act without delay taking all necessary measures for the protection and preservation of natural creation.«

by the degree to which the Church Fathers considered social doctrine and commitment to be essential to peoples' life and to the whole of Christianity. Already in the sixth century St John Chrysostom violently condemned the apathy of Christians: »I see the body of the Church stretched out on the ground like a corpse. I see its members, but like a lifeless body, none of them is functioning ... We call each other sisters and brothers. We are members of the same body — in name. In fact, however, we are divided like wild animals.«⁷ Nothing else makes us imitators of Christ, but showing concern for the neighbour.⁸ No miracle, no martyrdom can save us, if we do not have perfect *agape* (love) — solidarity with one another.⁹

»Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.« The Patristic exposition of this maxim is consistent and explicit. Every effort towards personal *holiness* must have a social dimension. St John Chrysostom says that to seek only one's own salvation is the surest way of losing it; he compares the Christian to a soldier who is tempted to save himself in the midst of the battle. Our King, he says, commands us to stand and fight not looking to personal interests, but to the survival of the whole army. Vladimir Soloviev is only repeating him when he says: »Salvation is, for me, those who save others.«

While the struggle continues, no single social form can ever be »dogmatized«, for each form is relevant and incarnates only more or less the ideal of *justice* and of the good. Being the locus of the »Word which judges«, the Church stands above all existing political and economic regimes. It can live under religiously indifferent capitalism, as it is the case in many of the First World societies; it can lead the life of martyrdom under atheistic Marxism, as has happened for many decades in many of the Central and Eastern European countries and in other parts of the world; however, since a few months or in some cases years, the »Iron Curtain« has fallen, and freedom and liberty reigns everywhere. This freedom has enabled the Church to be the conscience of humankind and to minister charismatically by seeking approaches to the absolute through the changing and relative forms of history, in order to rediscover its true identity and mission within the world where it lives.

Christ's Teaching

The New Testament does not extol any social system in particular. Christ proclaims the coming of the Kingdom, not any kingdom but his Father's, God's Kingdom, and he has not a word to say about the political, social and economic institutions of his time. The difficult saying, »Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's« (Mt 22:21), at least teaches us not to confuse heavenly and earthly kingdoms. »Seek first the (heavenly) kingdom and all the rest (the earthly kingdom) will be added to you.« (Mt 6:33) This means that the *invisible* absolute validates the *visible* relative. Anyway, relatives exist by relation to an absolute. Caesar is not Caesar except in relation to God. As

⁷ Homily on 2 Cor. 27, ch. 4.

⁸ Homily on 1 Cor. 25, ch. 3.

⁹ Ibid., ch. 4.

St Paul says, »There is no authority except come from God« (Rom 13:1). Without God, Caesar would be only a manifestation of the absurd. In Dostoevsky's *Possessed* someone tells an officer that God does not exist and he cries out: »If God does not exist, am I still a captain?«

Human beings get their dignity from being a »theophany«, and the love of humankind is justified because of what Nicolas Cabasilas, a Byzantine church writer, called God's »insane love« for humankind. By becoming flesh, God identifies himself with »man« and reveals that he has been created in God's image. But God is one and three, unity in plurality and diversity. This means that the human being is never alone.

The reality of the people of God, become one in Christ, is the basis upon which the Church formulates the *social dogma* of the fraternal koinonia/communion of all humanity, for it is in this communion that Christ is really present.

Without criticizing social structures, the Gospel incarnates a basic attitude in human relationships, the attitude which St John Chrysostom would later call sacramental. He says that the love of the neighbour, or better the »commitment to the neighbour«, is a »sacrament« because under the visible form of the neighbour we receive the grace of the invisible presence of Christ. It is this presence which makes us everyone's neighbour. The whole Last Judgment concentrates on this »sacramental attitude« towards the sick, the hungry, the poor, the prisoners, etc.

But we are entering a completely new era. The problems of capitalism, technocracy, Third World War, hunger and religious conflicts have become burning issues for all the churches. Eschatology no longer masks laziness, theological obscuratism, indifference toward the world and passivity.

The deep realization of the present crisis, of the threat of a new barbarianism with the destruction of the human person and possibly of the world, is visibly the judgment of God on the world and the Church. Every age has its own crisis and judgment, and this is what eschatology should study, not absolutely the end of the world hidden in God's transcendent decree.

The eschatology, as it is developed in the Holy Scriptures and in the Father's theology, demands solutions for our social structures and life concerns. The only efficacious revolution for social ethical issues concerns the one from the Good News messages, for here God himself enjoins human beings to seize the Kingdom and instal his *eternal justice* (aionios dikaiosyne) (cf. Isa 55:3; 61:8). According to the Church Fathers, humankind is a *microcosm*, but the Church, the Christian human community is a *macro-anthropos*, it is the site of the *apokatastasis*, the sphere of the *parousia* and the »new world« in power and strength. Christianity is not the religion of the individual salvation, but the religion of the transfiguration of the human conscience.

This means that a new social form will not come only from people's minds, but rather from the Holy Spirit. A prayer, invoking the Holy Spirit, says: »Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who are present everywhere filling all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life, *come* and dwell in us ...«. No theology or ecclesiology is possible, particularly with regard to Church and world, if one neglects to look at the world as a whole, created and supported by God and fulfilled in his creation. The Church, whose essence is the divine-human fulness of life in the Holy Spirit, represents thus the macro-

cosm of the whole creation. Its unity in Church reflects the unity of the »cosmos« created by God. In Christ and his Body, the Church of which He is the head, everything was created and reconciled (Col 1:16–21).¹⁰

I. The »Sacramental« Dimension of the Creation

»Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee.« With these words the Liturgy of St Chrysostom captures the heart of the Orthodox understanding of our relationship to creation and Creator. Creation is of God. We do not own creation but are the free agents through whom creation is offered to the Creator.¹¹

The purpose of creation is summed up in its worship of the Creator. This is most beautifully expressed in the Christmas Hymns. »What shall we offer Thee, O Christ, who for our sake was seen on earth as man? For every thing, created by Thee, offers Thee thanks. The angels offer Thee their hymn; the heavens, the star; the Magi their gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, the cave; the wilderness, the manger, while we offer Thee a Virgin Mother, O pre-eternal God, have mercy upon us.«¹²

The whole of the universe worships and offers gifts to its Creator. In the very shape of the churches and the placing of the icons, mosaics or frescoes within them, we find a microcosm of the universe which clarifies the role both of humanity and of the rest of creation in relation to God. For it is an expression not just of what is on earth today, but of what exists in heaven and what is to come — the eschatological promise and the redemptive transformation of all creation through the salvation brought by Christ Jesus. This is expressed by St Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8. As the Greek Fathers have also taught, »God became man so that man can become God«, and St Gregory Palamas used to say »while creation can be transfigured by the action of the uncreated energies of God«.

In worship the Orthodox Church conveys this profound understanding of creation. In particular, the role of humanity as the »priesthood of creation« is most clearly shown.

The blessing of the waters shows us the sanctifying and redemptive power given to an element of creation through the invocation of the Holy Spirit by the Church: »Therefore, O King, who lovest mankind, do Thou Thyself be present now as then through the descent of Thy Holy Spirit and sanctify this water. And confer upon it the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction to demons, inaccessible to the adverse powers and filled with angelic strength: that all who draw from it and partake of it may have it for the cleansing of their soul and body, for the healing of their passions, for the sanctification of their dwellings, and for every purpose that is expedient. For Thou art our God, who hast renewed through water and spirit our nature

¹⁰ Cf. G. Limouris, *The Integrity of Creation in a world of Change Today. Patristic Perspectives*, *Theologia* 61/1–2 (1990) 19ff.

¹¹ Cf. *Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis*, Gland/Switzerland 1990, pp. 4–13.

¹² Hymn of Christmas Vespers.

grown old through sin ...»¹³ Worship is about the celebration and use of all aspects of the senses. It is about sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. It uses and appreciates the material — be that wood and paint, writing materials, bread and wine or burning incense.

»I shall not cease reverencing matter, by means of which my salvation has been achieved ...«,¹⁴ St John Damascus wrote in his essay defending icons. The use of materials to make icons and the presence of elements of the natural world in most icons — animals, plants, countryside, mountains, rivers — all affirm the God-given nature of creation, its transfiguration and its place with us in salvation. The anti-gnostic teachings of the Church mean that the material world is held to be of God and is thus, in its essence, good.

Similarly, Byzantine churches were built in harmony with their natural surroundings. The art of architecture was not autonomous but together with iconography and chant contributed to the ethos of worship, giving it its physical, material expression. Thus it was natural that absolute symmetry was usually avoided; each architectural feature retained its own character while maintaining complete harmony with the overall conception.

At the centre of worship is the Eucharist, the most sublime expression and experience of creation transformed by God's Spirit through redemption and worship. In the form of bread and wine, elements coming from creation moulded into new form by human hands, are offered to God with the acknowledgment that all of creation is God's and that we are returning to God what is His. In the sense that this captures the primordial relationship of Adam to both God and creation, it is a sign of restoring that relationship of *koinonia* and even more than that, a foretaste of the eschatological state of creation. When we partake of the body and blood of Christ, God meets us in the very substance of our relationship with creation and truly enters into the very being of our biological existence.¹⁵

From this we know that humanity occupies the most special place of all in creation — but is not the whole of creation. We know that as all is from God (cf. Job 38–39), we must respect creation and acknowledge that we are not its owners, but the ones who may enhance it by use of our technology and skill, only however so as to offer it again to its Creator. There is no escape from the conclusion that we are responsible, before God, for the care of creation. It is our responsibility to protect its extraordinary richness and preserve, through wise use, its resources, not least that of energy, which has become a crucial example of our power over creation and also of the potentially disastrous results of the greedy exercise of that power.

Meanwhile, just as the celebrant at the Eucharist offers the fulness of creation and receives it back, as the blessing of grace in the form of the consecrated bread and wine, to share it with others, so we must be the channel through which God's grace and deliverance is shared with all creation. The human being is simply, yet gloriously, the means

¹³ Prayer for the Blessing of Waters at Epiphany.

¹⁴ On the Images, I, 16.

¹⁵ Cf. John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Understanding of the World and the Modern Man*, *Christian Symposium* (1967) 183 ff. (in Greek).

for the expression of creation in its fulness and the coming of God's deliverance for all creation.

As the Syrian writer Saint Isaac taught, »the human man approaches ravening beasts, and when their gaze rests upon him, their wildness is tamed. They come up to him as to their Master, wag their heads and tails, and lick his hands and feet, for they smell coming from him that same scent that exhaled from Adam before the fall, when they were gathered together before him and he gave them names in Paradise. This was taken away from us, but Jesus has renewed it, and given it back to us through His Coming. This it is what has sweetened the fragrance of the race of men«.¹⁶

But, when we look today at our world, we see a completely different picture. Humanity's rebellion, pride and greed has shattered the primordial relationship of Adam. It has ignored or discarded the Church's understanding of our role as »priests of the creation« for we behave like the exploiters and robbers of creation. By doing so, we have destroyed not just species but entire eco-systems. Our world is facing a crisis of death and corruption to a degree never before experienced. The Church Fathers, while being able to recognize the basic cause, **sin**, never had to experience such all-embracing and life-threatening consequences of sin to creation as we do today.

»The earth is mourning, withering, the heavens are pining away with the earth«, Isaiah preached. »The earth defiled under its inhabitants' feet, for they have transgressed the law, violated the precept, broken the everlasting covenant. So a curse consumes the earth and its inhabitants suffer the penalty, that is why the inhabitants of the earth are burnt up and few are left.« (Isa 24:4–6)

Throughout the world, forests are being destroyed by fires and logging, wetlands are being drained for development and agriculture; species are disappearing as a result of greed and ignorance; natural resources are being wasted faster than they can be replenished; waters are being soiled and skies polluted. This global crisis is threatening the very world upon which we human beings depend.

Humanity must attempt to return to a proper relationship with the Creator and his creation. This may well mean that just as a shepherd will, in times of greatest hazard, lay down his life for his flock, so human beings may need to forego part of their wants and needs in order that the survival of the natural world can be assured. This is a new situation — a new challenge. It calls for humanity to bear some of the pain of creation as well as to enjoy and celebrate it. It calls first and foremost for **repentance** — but of an order not previously understood by many.

»Love all God's creation«, wrote Fyodor Dostoevsky, »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. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly, more, more and more every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an abiding universal love. Love the whole world with an abiding universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble it, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God's intent.«

¹⁶ Ascetical Homilies, Homily 77.

But repentance without action is meaningless. As Christ says, »Many will call me, 'Lord, Lord'« (cf. Rom 10:12), but only those »who do the will of my Father shall enter heaven« (cf. Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32). So we must call for an ascetic approach to give expression in our everyday life, to this repentance.

The monastic and ascetic traditions of Orthodoxy offer important insights to it. They develop sensitivity to the suffering of all creation; there are many stories of saints living side by side with other creatures, sharing their everyday life. They offer a celebratory use of resources of creation in a spirit of »enkrateia« (self-control, voluntary abstention) and liberation from the passions. Within such a tradition many have experienced a more profound joy and a more lasting satisfaction than the ephemeral pleasures of a consumer society. The emphasis in the cenobitic monastic tradition on community rather than individual life is central to a balanced understanding of our daily needs.

It is in this asceticism that many people will experience the pain which is that of the shepherd willing to suffer for the sake of this flock. For without substantial changes in how we live and what we expect from life, we will fail to fulfil our God-given role in creation.

Hence, Orthodox spirituality underlines any notion of solidarity with the world and is always eminently realistic and without superficial emotionalism. This phenomenon of spirituality has nothing to do with certain individual attitudes of rigid conservatism and other-worldliness which deny the reality of the world and encourage contemplation through a form of monasticism that is not a genuine experience of the authentic Orthodox mentality. Monasticism and the contemplative life are, for the Orthodox, simply signs of the end of history and of the eschatological discussion of the Church inaugurated in time by the arrival of the Paraclete. Thus, monasticism is a vivifying liturgical presence of continuous prayer and doxology that humanity addresses to the work of Christ while awaiting the Second Coming in glory.

Too many have allowed greed, selfishness and ignorance to alter our world and the way we relate to it. The agricultural land, once clean and productive, has been spoiled by excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Through the burning of forests land grabbers are destroying a fragile resource simply to gain illegal title to land. Both large and small developers who dump raw sewage into the once crystal-clear seas and who build on the beaches are attacking not only those of us who were content to live in harmony with nature, a nature that is now vanishing, but also many aspects of the creation as a whole.

Humanity cannot continue to plunder God's creation without reaping the results of its eventual destruction.

It should also be noted that humanity cannot look at creation and decide what is useful and what is not. Jesus taught us that it was through those things which men called foolish that God has often spoken to us. The weak, the »useless«, the foolish, the broken have to be taken as part of the whole of creation, for through them we can often glimpse more of God than through the great, the powerful and the useful.

II. Humanity's Failure

One of the aspects that justice and peace are determining is freedom. What is freedom? This word is normally used in order to indicate the capacity to choose two or more possibilities. Why choose between what is given to me and not be free to create my own possibilities? You can see how the question of freedom and that of creation, out of nothing, are interrelated; if one creates out of something, one is presented by something given; if one creates out of nothing, one is free in the absolute sense of the term.

But what about the human being? »Man« (anthropos) is by definition a creature. This means that he is presented with a given reality. The fact that in the biblical account of humanity's creation he emerges at the end of the creative process makes human beings doubly restricted; the word is given to them, and God the Creator is given to them, too. They can choose what they like, but they cannot avoid the fact of givenness. Are they therefore free in an absolute sense?

It is at this point that the idea of the **imago Dei** emerges. Christian anthropology, since its earliest days, insisted that »man« was created »in the image and likeness of God«. The idea, or rather the expression, appears for the first time in the Old Testament, in the Genesis account of the creation. It is taken up by the Church Fathers and Christian theology throughout history. Various meanings have been given to this experience which identifies the image of God in man with his reason. Whatever the case may be, one thing must be certain: if we speak of an image and link to God, we must refer inevitably to something which characterizes God in an exclusive way. If the »imago Dei« consists in something to be found outside God, it is not an image of God. We are therefore talking about a quality pertaining to God and not to creation.

This forces us to seek the **imago Dei** in freedom. In the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa already defined this idea as »man's freedom to the master of himself«. If this freedom is taken in the way in which it is applied to God — which is what it ought to be if we are talking about an image of God — then, we are talking about absolute freedom in the sense of not being confronted with anything given. But this would be absurd. For man is a creature and cannot but be confronted with anything given.

It is at this point that another category, pertaining exclusively to the definition of the human, emerges. It is tragedy, the tragic. Tragedy is the impasse created by a freedom driving towards its fulfilment and being unable to reach it. The tragic applies only to the human condition and is not applicable either to God or to the rest of creation. It is impossible to have a complete definition of man without reference to the tragic element, and this is related directly to the subject of freedom. Dostoevsky, the great Christian prophet of modern times, put his finger on this crucial issue when he placed the following words in the mouth of Kirilov, one of the heroes in »The Possessed«: »Everyone who wants to attain complete freedom must be daring enough to kill himself ... This is the final limit of freedom, that is all, there is nothing beyond it. Who dares to kill himself becomes God. Everyone can do this and thus cause God to cease to exist, and then nothing will exist at all.«

If man wishes to be God, he has to cope with the givenness of his own being. As long as he is faced with the fact that he is »created«, which means that his being is given to him, he cannot be said to be free in the absolute sense.

Yet man in so many ways manifests his desire to attain such an absolute freedom; it is in fact precisely this that distinguishes him from the animal world. Why did God give him such an unfulfillable drive? In fact, many people would wish for themselves as well as for others that they were not free in this absolute sense. The Christian Church itself has produced throughout the centuries devices by which man, particularly the Christian, would be so tamed and so domesticated that he would give up all claims to absolute freedom, leaving such claims only to God. But certainly, if God gave such a drive to man, if He made him in His own image, He must have had a purpose. We suggest that his purpose has to do precisely with the survival of creation, with man's call to be »the priest of Creation«, as we have mentioned earlier.

Christian anthropology speaks of the first man, Adam, as having been placed in paradise with the order to exercise dominion over creation. That he was supposed to do this, in and through his **freedom**, is implied by the fact that he was presented with a decision to obey or disobey a certain commandment by God. This commandment involved the invitation to exercise the freedom implied in the **imago Dei**, i.e. to act as if man were God. This Adam did, and the result was the fall and sin.

At this point the question arises: why did man fall by exercising what God Himself had given him, namely freedom? Would it have been better for him and for creation had he not exercised, but rather sacrificed and abolished, this absolute kind of freedom? Would it not perhaps have been better for all of us if Adam had been content with a relative freedom as befits a creature? Did the tragedy of the fall consist in the **excess** of the limits of human freedom and justice?

The answer which should commonly be given to these questions is a positive one: yes, Adam exceeded the limits of his freedom, and this is why he fell. It is for this reason that Adam's fall is commonly associated with Adam's fault, a fault to be understood therefore forensically.

There are various ways of interpreting the Fall other than the one involving a blame on Adam for having exceeded the limits of his freedom. We shall perhaps have to abandon forensic categories of guilt. It may be more logical, more consistent with our view of the **imago Dei**, if we followed not St Augustine but rather St Irenaeus in this respect.

St Irenaeus took a very »philanthropic«, a very compassionate view of Adam's fall. He thought of him as a child placed in Paradise in order to grow to adulthood by exercising his freedom. But he was deceived and did the wrong thing. What does this mean? It was not a question of exceeding the limits of freedom, but rather a question of applying absolute freedom in the wrong way. That is very different from saying that Adam ought to have adjusted the drive of his freedom to his creaturely limitations. For had he adjusted his freedom this way, he would have lost the drive to absolute freedom, whereas now he can still have it, but re-adjusts and re-orientes it.

The implications are far-reaching and include all sorts of consequences for legalistic views of sin which, not by accident, go hand in hand with cries for relativised freedom. Man was given the drive to absolute freedom, the **imago Dei**, not for himself but for creation itself.

Thus, the whole cosmos is ready to receive the »new creation« which is celebrating God's manifestation on the earth and opens new horizons for revolution. It is ready to

receive this »new creation« only with justice and peace and unity of humankind. Humanity becomes a receiver of the »new heaven and the new earth« which tries to be transformed into a new reality and to overcome *death* and *sin*. The whole world is expecting this new transformation, transfiguration, the day of the »new Epiphany«, and it is still on the way to the age of hope and expectation.

III. A »Personal« Approach to Creation

It has already been noted that creation does not possess any natural means of survival. This means that if left to itself, it would die. The only way to avoid this would be the restoration of the *koinonia*/communion with the eternal God. This, however, would require a movement of transcendence beyond the boundaries of creation. It would require, in other words **justice, freedom and peace** in the absolute sense. If creation were to attempt its survival only by obedience to God, in the sense of its realizing, so to say, its own limitations and not attempting to transcend them, and John Zizioulas would say,¹⁷ its survival would require the miracle of the **Deus ex machina** intervention. This would have to result in a claim which would bear no logical relation to the rest of doctrine, as it's precisely the case with all **Deus ex machina** solutions. If we accept the view that the world needs to transcend itself in order to survive (which is the logical consequence of having accepted that the world had a beginning), we need to find a way of achieving this transcendence. This is what the **imago Dei** was given for.

The transcendence of the limits of creation is the condition for its survival, requires on the part of creation a drive to absolute freedom. The fact that this drive was given to man made the whole creation rejoice, in the words of St Paul »awaiting with eager expectation the revelation of the glory of the children of God«, i.e. of man. Because man, unlike the angels (who are also regarded as endowed with freedom) forms an organic part of the material world, being the highest point in its evolution, and he is able to carry with him the whole creation to its transcendence. The fact that the human being is also an animal, as Darwin has reminded us, far from being an insult, constitutes — in spite, perhaps, of Darwin's intentions — the **sine qua non** condition for his glorious **mission in creation**. If man gave up his claim to absolute freedom, the whole creation would automatically lose its hope for survival.

But how can man liberate creation from its boundaries and lead it to survival through his freedom? At this point Christian theology has to rely on its doctrinal resources rather heavily to avoid as far as possible making it a matter of »esoteric« language understood only by those who have access to it by virtue of their doctrinal commitment.¹⁸

Reference was already made to man's tendency of creating a new world. This tendency continues his specific characteristic compared with animals and is, in this sense, an essential expression of the image of God in him. If analyzed deeply, this means that man

¹⁷ Cf. John Zizioulas, *Preserving God's Creation*, three Lectures of Theology and Ecology, given at King's College, in January 1989 (mimeographed). We thank the esteemed author for the substantial material which we have used for this paper.

¹⁸ Ibid.

wishes to pass through his own hands everything that exists and make it his own. Making it »his own« may mean that man can use creation for his own benefit, in which case by being placed in man's hand creation is not truly lifted to the level of the human, but subjected to it. This is one of the ways in which man can understand God's commandment to have dominion over the earth: it could be called the **utilitarian** way.

Anthropologically speaking man would cut himself off from nature as if he did not belong to it himself. The utilitarian attitude to creation would then go hand in hand with the view that man differs from the rest of creation by way of his capacity to dissociate himself from it rather than to associate himself with it. It would also go together with the possibility of denying God and divinising man. Atheism and man's dissociation from nature would thus be shown to be interconnected. They both spring from the **imago Dei** and confirm the view that the difference between man and creation relates to the question of freedom. Needless to say, the ecological problem has its philosophy rooted deeply in this kind of anthropology. An understanding of the world as man's **possession** — as a means of drawing from it selfsatisfaction and pleasure — this is what taking the world in man's hands means in this case.

Science and technology then signify the employment of man's intellectual superiority for the purpose of discovering ways and means by which man may draw the biggest possible profit from creation for his own purpose. In this case, a theology based on the assumption that the essence of man lies in his intellect would be co-responsible with science and technology for the ecological problem.

Making the world pass through the hands of man may mean something entirely different from what humanity and the world ask for. Of course, man would still use creation as a source from which he would draw the basic elements necessary for his creation as a source for his life — such as food, clothing, building of houses, etc. but to all this he would give a dimension which we could call »personal«.¹⁹

Man (anthropos) cannot be understood in isolation but only in relation to something or someone else. A **personal** approach to creation as distinct from an **individualistic** one would regard the human being as someone whose particular identity arises from his relation with what is not human. This could be both or either God and/or creation. It is not, therefore, in juxtaposition to nature but in association with it that man would find his specific identity. Man would be other than nature, not by separating himself from it, but by relating himself to it. This will become immediately evident in culture; the way man eats or is dressed or builds his house and would involve a close relationship with what is not human, with what is significantly called »the environment«. A personal approach to creation would thus elevate the material world to the level of man's existence. The material creation would in this way be liberated from its own limitations and by being placed in the hands of man, it would itself acquire a personal dimension; it would be **humanised**.

The personal dimension, as distinct from the individual one, involves what we may call **hypostasisation** and **catholicity**. These terms are technical in theology but they can be easily translated into non-theological language. A **hypostasis** is an identity which em-

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

bodies and expresses in itself the totality of nature. The personal approach makes every being unique and irreplaceable, whereas the individual approach makes of it a number in statistics. If man acts as a person rather than an individual in treating creation, he not only lifts it up to the level of the human, but he sees it as a totality, as a catholicity of interrelated entities. Creation is, thus, able to fulfil the unity which, as natural science observers to-day, is inherent in its very structure.

Therefore, the personhood in man demands constantly that creation be created as something destined by God not only to survive but also to be »fulfilled« in and through man's hands. There are two basic dimensions in personhood, both of which enable the human being to fulfil his role as the link between God and creation. One is what may be called its **hypostatic** aspect, through which the world is integrated and embodied into a unified reality. The other is what can be called its **ecstatic** aspect by virtue of which the world by being referred to God and offered to Him as »His own« reaches itself to infinite possibilities. This constitutes the basis of what can be called **man's priesthood**. By taking the world into his hands and creatively integrating it and by referring it to God, man liberates creation from its limitations and lets it truly be. Thus, in being the priest of creation, man is also a creator, and, perhaps, it may be said that in all of his truly creative activities there is hidden a para-priestly character. In speaking of »priesthood«, therefore, we speak of a broader existential attitude encompassing all human activities that involve a conscious or even unconscious manifestation of these two aspects of personhood: the **hypostatic** and the **ec-static**, as we have just described them.

To put all this in terms of Christian doctrine, Christians believe that what Adam failed to do Christ did. Christ is regarded as the embodiment of **recapitulation** (*anakephalaiosis*) of all creation and, therefore, as the **man par excellence** and the saviour of the world. We regard Him, because of this, as the true »image of God« and we associate Him with the final fate of the world. We, therefore, believe that in the person of Christ the world possesses its priest of creation, the model of man's proper relation to the natural world.

On the basis of this belief, a community is formed which takes from this creation certain elements (the bread and the wine) which are offered to God with the solemn declaration »Thine own of thine own we offer unto Thee«, thus recognizing that creation does not belong to us but to God, who is its only »owner«. By so doing, we believe that creation is brought back into relation with God the Creator.

IV. Man's Priesthood

It seems that the ecological crisis is a crisis of culture. It is a crisis that has to do with the loss of the sacrality of nature in our culture. I can see only two ways of overcoming this. One would be the way of paganism. The pagan regards the world as sacred because it is permeated by divine presence; he therefore respects it (to the point of worshipping it explicitly or implicitly) and does not want to damage to it. But equally, he never worries about its fate: he believes in its eternity. He is also unaware of any need for transformation of nature or transcendence of its limitations: the world is good as it stands and possesses in its nature all that is necessary for its survival.

The other way is what we have often tried to describe here as being the Christian way. The Christian regards the world as sacred because it stands in dialectical relationship with God: thus he respects it (without worshipping it, since it has no divine presence in its nature), but he regards the human being as the only possible link between God and creation, a link that can either bring nature to communion with God and thus sanctify it, or turn it ultimately towards man — or nature itself — and condemn it to the state of a thing whose meaning and purpose are exhausted with the satisfaction of human being.

Of these two ways, the second one that attaches to man a heavy responsibility for the fate of creation. The first one sees man as part of the world; the second, by considering man to be the crucial link between the world and God, sees him as the only person in creation, i.e. as the only one who would be so deeply respectful of the impersonal world as not simply to »preserve« it, but to cultivate and embody it in forms of culture which will elevate it to eternal survival. Unless we decide to return to paganism, this seems to be the only way to respect once again the sacrality of nature and face the ecological crisis. For it is now clear that the model of human domination over nature, such as we have it in our present day technological ethos, will no longer do for the survival of God's creation.

The apostolic community of Jerusalem up to the year 70 succeeded in practising, as Paul Evdokimov used to say, a voluntary »communion of love«²⁰ which remains a model and source of inspiration. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the expectation of the **pa-rousia** minimized material care, the apostles chose women and men for the social ministry, the **diakonia**, of the Church — a charismatic service quite distinct from the **priestly office** and one which would later become the task of the parish laity. The **Didaché**, however, one of the most ancient sources of information of that time, counsels fraternal sharing given or identified through the richness of the creative world.

Later on, The Renaissance brought religious and economic individualism. Spirituality took no interest in the problems of work, the body or the material and increasingly secularized world, and contemporary society shut out the oneness of the soul. The capitalist system encounter no moral resistance from the already decadent Christian society which tolerated, then sanctioned, economic and industrial exploitation.

With the French Revolution the social ideal temporarily took a hostile attitude to all religions, mainly European, influence. Socialism inherited this attitude even though it had its origins in medieval evangelical poverty movements. St Simon and other utopians were Christian romantics, and the climate was unconsciously religious. When Marx transformed socialism into historical and dialectical materialism, the conscience of the Western Church was finally awakened: Leo XIII spoke of an »economic immorality«; Pius XI condemned certain principles of capitalism; Paul VI followed the doctrine of his predecessors, but he put a much stronger emphasis on the opposition between human community and the economic individualism. And John Paul II, with the *Centesimus Annus* Encyclical on »*Rerum Novarum*«, renewed the interest of the Roman Catholic Church for a new evangelisation of Europe based upon new economic systems in view of the changes in Central and Eastern Europe, and unmasked the eternal interest of his

²⁰ Cf. P. Evdokimov, *The Social Dimension of Orthodox Ecclesiology*, *Theology Digest* 18/1 (1970) 45.

Church by »a new conquest« — as many Orthodox theologians strongly used to believe — in a new fertile era and within new possibilities. Meanwhile, this phenomenon directly or indirectly created, due to the recent changes in Central and Eastern European countries and churches, a new imbroglio to the Roman Catholic-Orthodox relationships, particularly in their theological bilateral dialogue, with the crucial problem of »Uniatism« and the »Uniate churches«.

Today, Why Not Earlier?

Since the end of the 16th century, and especially after the painful Soviet experience, the mystical belief in the »utopia of an earthly paradise« has given way to disillusionment and deep discouragement. It has become clear that the perfect society in a threatening creation is unattainable because evolution will always go on and on ... Only Christian personalism has a chance of giving an adequate answer and resolving the present problems, for, unlike capitalism, individualism and Marxist collectivism, it insisted for many decades on the basic worth of the human person as subject (not object) and sought his fulfilment only in communion with all other individuals. Here is the so-called **sobornost** that Orthodox theology used to affirm. Now the »Iron Curtain« has fallen, and countries and socio-economic systems of the former Communist societies are struggling for a new identity and a new vision.

Looking at the Future: An Ocean of Signs of Hope

The Orthodox Church has put behind papal encyclicals and Anglo-Saxon social activism. As it was experienced in past decades, Marxist ideology was unable either to formulate or express its ideology. But having rediscovered its »false« image as a poor, servant Church, it purged itself of every »triumphant and terrorist« notion of »religion«. This was its only adequate expression of its mystery: to follow in the footsteps of the Christ »oikonomos«, the sorrowful and suffering servant of Yahweh. Perhaps there is, even now, no more disarming answer to the modern forms of atheism. Eastern Europe has been liberated; and is atheism still alive in people's hearts and minds?

The tragedy for the Church was that it accepted social reforms only after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Swiss Socialist Ragaz remarked the tragic split between those who believed in God, but were not interested in his Kingdom and the atheists who wanted to build the Kingdom, but did not believe in God. But we are entering a completely new epoch. The problems emerged from the capitalist systems in Europe, in the USA and in the industrial countries of the northern hemisphere. Hunger and war in the Third World have also become burning issues for all the churches concerned. And here lies the whole problem of the JPIC process: churches are in process of reaffirming anew their religious belief, but on the other hand their vision of God's kingdom — fulfilment — has been influenced by ideologies, socioeconomic and political systems and others. Eschatology no longer masks laziness, theological obscuratism, indifference toward the world, and passivity. The deep realization of the present contemporary world crisis, of the threat of »a new barbarism« with the destruction of the human person and possibly of the world and humanity, is visibly the judgment of God in the world and the Church. Every age has its

own crisis and judgment, and this is what eschatology teaches, not the end of the world hidden in God's transcendent decree.

Injustices lead to conflict, violence and war — this comes from the world's experience and reality today. For many war is an act against **love**, humanity and creation and therefore cannot be carried out in the name of God who is on the side of the victims, the suffering, the poor. For Christians, God and the human beings, and thus the divine and human powers or rights, are no longer exclusive as they have been fully reconciled through the vent of Christ's Incarnation. Consequently all people of whatever belief, cultural or ethnic background have been declared equal and loved by the same God of all creation. In this sense Christ's Incarnation becomes for Christians the basis of God's justice and peace in the world, the cosmos.

However, the question that many people are still asking is whether justice and peace should be attained only through peaceful means or whether they could also be legitimately reached through war and conflicts. In this regard Christians and people of other living faiths have adopted »pacifism« and the »just war theory«. In the Middle East, for example, people have been suffering from the ongoing conflicts in the region and are increasingly against war and the absurdity of violence. Similar situations still continue to happen in other countries, e.g. Northern Ireland.

Every time we are reflecting on or discussing international solidarity or the solidarity of the churches, we are confronted with two apparently contradictory historical trends.

The first is **internationalism**. This trend, as Gabriel Habib, the wise General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, affirmed²¹, considers that the world is getting smaller through modern technology, and, on the basis of secular humanism, it is becoming a community of individuals who are equal regardless of their particular ethnic, cultural or religious background. Solidarity in this case consists in helping individuals everywhere to become aware of their belonging to one world community and of their need for global struggles aimed at liberating humanity and creation from all forms of oppression and exploitations.

The second is the search for **particularism**. This trend considers that, although the world is getting smaller due to modern communication, it should be regarded as a community, not of individuals, but of communities, based on particular ethnic, cultural or religious criteria. In this case, solidarity becomes the close cooperation between such Christian communities or churches willing to **recognize** and **respect** each other's particular characteristics in the pursuit of common goals, visions and mutual commitments. This seems to have been the trend in many countries, at least during the past two decades.

Millions of people, particularly among the younger generation, are deeply concerned and worried about what is happening to the natural environment. They are often the people who question Christianity and are obsessed with church politics or with the lack of information, or at least about their responsibility for today's concerns. Without any doubt Christianity has a significant role to play with its vital forces and has to respond positively to these worries by offering faith, hope and love, and also an answer, how to preserve and save the environment. Ian Bradley, a Scottish minister, introduces one of

²¹ Cf. G. Habib, Solidarity for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, *MECC Newsport* Feb./March (1992) 10.

his recent books by saying: »... I am equally sure that if Christians fail to speak on what is almost certainly the most important issue of our time and do not enter into dialogue with those who are concerned about the environment, we will not only have lost an enormous missionary and pastoral opportunity but we will have failed the human race, the planet and, most important of all, we will have failed God; the Father who bears and cares about one sparrow falling from heaven, the Son who communed with the redeemed the wayward forces of nature and the Holy Spirit who brooders over the face of the waters just as she moves within our souls ...«²²

There can be little doubt that the threat, posed by human exploitation and pollution of the natural environment, is the most serious problem facing the world as we enter the last decade of the twentieth century. The scale of the ecological crisis is enormous and rising all the time — but so too is the extent of human concern about it. The struggle to save the environment has captured the hearts and imaginations of millions of people, not just those who vote for the Greens or Ecologists or join the Friends of the Earth. It is now firmly on the mainstream political and social agenda of governments and international organizations and can no longer be dismissed as a fringe issue of interest only to cranks and faddists.

The forthcoming line-up of world leaders in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, where also thousands of diplomats, scientists, ecologists, theorists, journalists as well as churches leaders and theologians will participate in order to discuss how to »save the earth«, is a positive sign of the world's main interest in the concerns of the planet. This so-called Earth Summit, more than two years in the making, will be the largest and most complex conference ever held — bigger than the momentous meetings of Versailles, Yalta and Potsdam. Those summits carved up empires, drew new borders and settled world wars. The agenda for the Earth Summit is more far-reaching: it sets out to confront not only the world's most pressing environmental problems — from global warming to deforestation — but poverty and underdevelopment as well. It is still possible that this world summit will be one of those landmark events that change the course of history, recasting the relationship of the nations of the world not only to one another but also to their environment. Or it could end up being a diplomatic disaster of global proportions, driving the wedge deeper between the industrialized and developing countries and thus setting back the cause of environmentalism.

The world has changed dramatically since the first Earth Summit, held twenty years ago in Stockholm. Scientists, ecologists and others raise many questions concerning its purposes and expectations.

What kind of planet will our children inherit? Will they have room to roam, air to breathe and food to eat? Will they ever see an eagle flying free or enjoy the solitude of a pristine mountain lake? and many, many others...

These are some among the larger questions on the agenda of the Earth Summit. The central premise of this unprecedented event is that environmental problems can no longer be solved at the national level. What will the concrete decisions be, how can they be im-

²² I. Bradley, *God is Green. Christianity and the Environment*, London 1990, p. 11.

plemented on an international or national level, and what will be the price? The answer is not certain, but there is some hope²³.

This is our great hope for the Christianity of the twenty-first century. The full realization of this hope of ours which is more than an accidental dream, also involves churches and communities, women and men, being deeply committed to and rooted in the life of their communities, in their experience of **life** and **faith**.

There is still much to do. According to St John's Gospel, Jesus at the Last Supper not only promised that he would remain with his disciples and ever be with them anew, but also that he would send them the Paraclete, the Spirit, as encourager, supporter, consoler and giver of life.

The Spirit promised by Jesus shapes the eucharistic Christian and the Eucharistic Church from top to bottom. It arouses thankful remembrance; it arouses readiness, watchfulness and discernment for the present time of salvation; it gives us the strength to become, in keeping with these promises, witness and instruments of the continual coming of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, in God's Spirit, we are a »new creation«, capable of bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit: »love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control« (Gal 5:22).

The Spirit's fruits are our common instruments, capable of challenging Christians and churches to respond to the needs of today's world, to preserve the integrity of the creation, to take care of the environment, to struggle against its threats for true peace and justice for the sake of the whole humanity.

»If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit« (Gal 5:25). The Spirit opens people's eyes, minds and hearts, shows new horizons for the future and strengthens them for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom on earth as in heaven.

²³ See the different articles on the Earth's Summit, *Time*, 139/22 (1.6.1992) 34–57.