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# Chicago Studies

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## **Responsibility for Creation**

*Editor's Corner – Spring/Summer 2020*

By Very Rev. Thomas A. Baima, M.B.A., S.T.D.

The three great monotheistic religions of the Middle East affirm the first sentence of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the . . . Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth." The existence of an almighty God, who is the creator and sustainer of the worlds is the first article of faith for Christians, as well as for Jews and Muslims. As such, theological reflection on creation, and the duty of creatures toward the creation rests on the first of our doctrinal statements. This is the faith into which each of the baptized ones are explicitly initiated. And as the baptismal ritual states "This is our faith and we are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the responsibility of creatures for the whole of creation. This theological awareness was first expressed by His All-Holiness, Demetrios, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch in 1989. His successor, Patriarch Bartholomew, in one of his addresses, drew a connection between ecology and morality. Over the same period of time, the Bishops of Rome consistently called to mind these and similar issues.

This teaching by popes and patriarchs converge in *Laudato Si' the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on the Care of Creation*. Indeed, the two bishops were united in the same concern and supported each other in their teaching. It was for this reason that the University of Saint Mary of the Lake invited the personal theologian to Patriarch Bartholomew, Archdeacon John Chrysavgis, to serve as the 2020 Albert Cardinal Meyer Lecturer.

The Reverend Archdeacon John Chrysavgis offers us two substantial explorations of our responsibility for creation. The first lecture: "On Earth as in Heaven: Toward an Ecological Ethos and Worldview," explores what theologians call "the beginning." He names the doctrine of creation as the preferred starting point, while pointing our attention to the fact that over the centuries we have lost the breadth and depth of this doctrine. Instead of shedding light it casts only a shadow. A focus on heaven has overshadowed Earth. He also states clearly that we are dealing with a doctrinal issue—revealed truths. The consequence is that proposing anything less than "the whole truth" amounts to heresy. The ecological crisis, therefore, is the business of theologians and all Christians, because it is a doctrinal crisis. Archdeacon John puts it so clearly when he writes: "The crisis concerns the way we imagine our world." On the sixth day of creation, God created humankind, in his image and likeness. One dimension of our likeness to God is responsibility for creation. The doctrinal issue, therefore, lead at once to moral issues of responsibility and the obligation to care for creation.

This obligation to care for creation is explored in the response to Archdeacon John's the first lecture was given by the Reverend Robert Schoenstene. Father Schoenstene approaches the question as a biblical exegete and takes us on a tour of the sacred scriptures using the vantage point of ecology to mine the texts for new insights. True to the biblical method of reasoning, he does not attempt a single definite resolution, but instead places the various aspects of the question of responsibility for creation into dialogue. This approach opens up the possibility for ongoing insight or wisdom.

For example, in the commandment in Leviticus about harvesting the land, the farmer is not to completely harvest all the produce. He is to leave some for the poor and the migrant. Father Schoenstene focuses our attention when he says “There are social responsibilities that go with the possession of the land that are part of the holiness of the covenant community. Spiritually, this requires the landowner to identify with the poor.

The biblical witness demands a vision of a just society. But justice here is a dimension of holiness, being set apart for service of the providence of God. Holiness in the Pentateuch is righteousness, or better “right relationship” for the Hebrew God is a relational deity, not first a metaphysical one.

Archdeacon John’s second lecture treated “Integral Ecology and Ecumenical Integrity.” He describes the relationship between the Pope and the Patriarch which I have already briefly mentioned. There could be no clearer expression of Pope Francis’ understanding of ecumenism as dialogue which leads to action. Already in *Evangelium Gaudium*, he lays out a vision where the discovery of the truth must lead to acts of charity. In order to reach full communion, we must act with openness to each other and communion creates the condition of compassion. Compassion is the condition which calls us to act responsibly.

Building on incarnational theology and Christology, Archdeacon John calls our attention to consider the implications of our doctrine that the Second Person of the Trinity took on a human nature—that the Creator took on the nature of the creature. He expands the notion of the Body of Christ with this move, calling for “compassion . . . which impels [the Pope and Patriarch] toward a shared unease for the exploitation of people and of the planet, both of whom they consider to be living members and sacred traces of the body of Christ.” If the Creator took on the nature of the creature, then, Patriarch Bartholomew says “to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin.”

Perhaps we in the West need this voice of the East to clarify our Christology. Most Western Christians never understood that the seventh ecumenical council (787 AD) was not about religious images, but about the capacity for the material world to convey grace. In this sense, ecumenical integrity is to receive the full ramifications of that ecumenical council.

When dialogue leads to cooperation, environmental justice can be seen as fully and integrally connected to social justice. In turn, such dialogue will make the witness of the baptized ones compelling to a new generation, thus taking on the character of mission.

The Reverend Ronald responded to the second lecture. Fr. Kunkel teaches the track within our curriculum which addresses the treatise on creation, theological anthropology, grace and eschatology. For too long, Christians have settled for too narrow a vision. With too narrow a focus on the human being and their individual salvation, it is more difficult to see the rest of the divine plan. Father Kunkel reminds us that an integral ecology demands an integral anthropology. This can be found in the theology of communion. *Koinonia* or *communio* is a relational reality. Connecting with Father Schoenstene’s insight of God as relational before metaphysical, Father Kunkel reminds us that “communion with God, our brothers and sisters, and the entirety of the created world represents the full actualization of the human person.” Rather than take away from the West’s traditional emphasis on the individual, it strengthens and expands it by seeing it through the Christological lens.

Finally, we have a timely contribution by Dr. Melanie Barrett entitled “Catholic Voting: How Ecclesial Authority, Moral Principles, and Prudential Judgment Intersect.” Dr. Barrett was the keynote speaker at the Chicago Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue, one of the longest running dialogue programs in the United States. That lecture took place in October of 2020, so voting was on everyone’s minds. The Jewish scholars were interested in the topic because of the differences

they observed in Catholic commentary around the public policy issues being discussed in Fall 2020. The essay is a tour through the biblical foundations, moral theology and natural law theory to the development of Catholic social thought as expressed in the pontifical magisterium. Of particular interest to the Jewish audience was how Dr. Barrett summarized the six human rights identified by Vatican II and Pope Saint John Paul II.

With this foundation, she takes us into a commentary on the U.S. Bishops' document on political responsibility. She helps readers understand the different degrees of authority found in official church teaching and the complexity of the task of applying the teaching with prudence in a concrete situation, and in both public policy and voting. No simple task, but one which Dr. Barrett shows includes a diversity of theological approaches and a wide latitude for individual prudential judgment.

Our authors remind us of the central role which responsibility plays in the Christian life, creating the unifying theme for this issue of *Chicago Studies*.

# **Integral Ecology and Ecumenical Integrity: The Vision of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew**

By Rev. Archdeacon John Chrysavgis, Ph.D.

## **A Personal Dialogue with Global Reverberations**

From even before his election and enthronement in 1991, I have been privileged to work very closely with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the issue of creation care. During this period, I have witnessed not only the endless time and ceaseless effort that he has committed and expended over the years, while also experiencing my own evolution and transformation that resulted from his unique vision. The patriarch's ministry and mission are, of course, an inspiration derived from the core of Scriptural teaching and the heart of Orthodox tradition, as well as from the sacramental and mystical spirituality that are common to the early church.

Whether it has involved organizing an international environmental conference or simply spending time with him in liturgy or work at the Phanar, the headquarters of the Church of Constantinople, I remain grateful for this unprecedented journey with His All-Holiness and the numerous opportunities and insights that it has afforded. Among these occasions and blessings, I would especially count the honor of attending the formal publication of the "green" encyclical or ecological letter issued by Pope Francis in Rome on the morning of June 18, 2015.

*Laudato Si'* ("Praise be to you"): *On Care for our Common Home* was jointly released—in the new synod hall of the Paul VI building at the Vatican—by Peter Cardinal Turkson of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace<sup>1</sup> and Metropolitan John of Pergamon, senior bishop and executive spokesman of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.<sup>2</sup> Of course, while the papal letter was long awaited and historical in many ways, it was not the method of its release that was itself uncommon. Encyclicals of the Vatican are normally delivered and publicly released by the principal representative or prominent authority of the encyclical's theme or content—in this case, Cardinal Turkson—and not the Pope himself. There is, moreover, another aspect of the encyclical that proved historical. This was the first time that a non-Catholic—in this case, an Orthodox hierarch—was invited to launch the encyclical jointly with the director of the relevant pontifical office. Thus, while dated May 24, 2015, the 184-page encyclical *Laudato Si'* was officially published at noon on June 18, 2015, at a news conference held in the Aula del Sinodo.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, theologians and environmentalists, politicians and pundits have already interpreted the encyclical in numerous and diverse ways—often, as Cardinal Turkson would remark, often reading into the text far more than the drafters themselves probably envisaged. Nevertheless, while it was not entirely surprising for Pope Francis to single out and highlight the exceptional example and eminent initiative of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, affectionately dubbed "the Green Patriarch"—a phrase publicized by the media in 1996 and formalized in the White House in 1997 by Al Gore, then Vice President of the United States—it was the first time that a formal papal encyclical referred at all, let alone so prominently and extensively, to an Orthodox prelate.

Indeed, in the opening pages of the document—following pronounced and recurrent reference to historical encyclicals published by his immediate predecessors<sup>4</sup>—

Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI (paragraphs 3–6); and prior to appealing and compelling reference to his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi (paragraphs 10–12)—the pope penned three substantial paragraphs under a sub-heading entitled: “United by the same concern” (paragraphs 7–9). The *New York Times* recorded: “Francis tapped a wide variety of sources in his encyclical, partly to underscore the universality of his message. He cites passages from his two papal predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and draws prominently from a religious ally, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church.”<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, then, Pope Francis was aware of the ecumenical foundations and implications of his encyclical, even plainly stating that he “shares the hope of full communion” with the Ecumenical Patriarch. Here are the pertinent paragraphs:

7. These statements of the Popes echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church’s thinking on these questions. Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches and Christian communities – and other religions as well – have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing. To give just one striking example, I would mention the statements made by the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the hope of full ecclesial communion.

8. Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for “inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage,” we are called to acknowledge “our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation.” He has repeatedly stated this firmly and persuasively, challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation: “For human beings . . . to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins.” For “to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.”

9. At the same time, Bartholomew has drawn attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms. He asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which “entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion.” As Christians, we are also called “to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with

God and our neighbors on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet."

In this context, communications between the Phanar and the Vatican throughout the lengthy drafting process of the anticipated encyclical demonstrated yet another aspect of ecumenical conversation and dialogue, of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) in the search for common ground and mutual action.

In my presentation this evening, I would like to offer some modest personal insights into the ecumenical and ecological contexts of this important papal statement, which is surely not destined solely for the followers of the Roman Catholic Church but for all Christians of all confessions. Cardinal Turkson has even observed that his office recognized from the outset that this encyclical was not exclusively directed to Christian believers, but in fact pertinent to all people of goodwill that are concerned about the welfare of humankind and the sustainability of our planet.

### **Dialogue as Communion: An Act of Openness**

Let me, then, share certain less familiar historical aspects of the encyclical in an effort to offer glimpses into less apparent dimensions of this document in order to provide insights into a crucial—paramount and personal—connection: namely, the vital relationship and ecumenical dialogue between a Pope and a Patriarch in the modern world.

Almost exactly one year before the publication of *Laudato Si'*, on May 24–25, 2015, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew traveled to the holy city of Jerusalem in order to commemorate and celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the historical visit there in 1964 by their illustrious and prophetic predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I. Later in the same year, December 7, 2015, marked another milestone, the fiftieth anniversary of what has become known as "the lifting of the anathemas"—namely, the formal enactment five decades earlier by the two same visionary prelates of the eradication from the painful memory of the church of the deplorable excommunications leading to the "great schism." These measures taken in the 1960s may not have reconciled, but arguably mitigated the tragic estrangement that took place between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the grievous and sweeping division between the Western and Eastern churches, almost one thousand years ago in 1054.

Through their pioneering and daring initiatives, in their apostolic vision and dedication to fulfill Christ's final commandment and fervent prayer that his disciples "may be one" (Jn 17:21), Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras broke a long and "loud" silence that spanned over ten centuries. Moreover, for over five hundred years, the leaders of the two ancient and most senior churches had neither spoken to nor even communicated with one another. So, when Paul and Athenagoras met in Jerusalem, it was the very first time that a Roman pontiff and an Eastern Patriarch were meeting face-to-face since the historical, albeit controversial Council of Florence in 1438. That council, highly anticipated as an opportunity to restore unity, in fact only ushered in a period of greater distrust and acute disunity. On that morning of January 5, 1964—the first time a Roman pontiff had flown in an airplane and the first time he had visited the Holy Land—when Patriarch Athenagoras was asked by journalists about the purpose of the meeting, he



replied: “I came here to say ‘good morning’ to my dear brother.”<sup>6</sup> His spur-of-the-moment rejoinder is reminiscent of a poem by Maya Angelou: “Here, on the pulse of this new day / You may have the grace to look up and out / . . . And into your brother's face / . . . And say simply / Very simply / With hope – Good morning.”<sup>7</sup>

“Fast forward” to March of 2013, when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew personally decided to attend the inaugural mass of Pope Francis in St. Peter’s Square. His spontaneous gesture signaled another first: it was the first time that any leader of either church had ever participated in such an event. Bartholomew intuitively sensed a unique honesty and humility in the newly elected pontiff. It was another piece of an ecumenical puzzle enriching and completing the commitment to dialogue planted in the hearts of these two leaders and reflecting the aspiration of their trailblazing, sometimes controversial forerunners.

Finally, there is another dimension to the dialogue between the two churches that invariably led to the rare and remarkable nature of *Laudato Si’*. Each year, on June 29 and November 30, the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople mark their respective official feasts, where once again the Patriarch of Constantinople is officially represented at the Vatican for a solemn celebration of the “patronal” Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, while the Pope of Rome is formally represented at the Phanar for the “thronal” Feast of St. Andrew. On occasion, the leaders themselves have attended these seminal and solemn occasions. Above and beyond the formal theological dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that commenced in 1980 on the island of Revelation, Patmos—“the dialogue of truth” that followed “the dialogue of love”—this powerful tradition of formal exchanges between the two churches began in 1969 and remains emblematic of a genuinely mutual effort for dialogue engaged on institutional and intellectual platforms.

Thus, in light of this sense of ecclesiastical hospitality, on November 30, 2018, in a message addressing the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Phanar, Pope Francis wrote that, despite theological differences, “both churches, with a sense of responsibility towards the world, have sensed that urgent call, which involves all those who have been baptized, to proclaim the Gospel to all men and women. For this reason, we can work together today in the search for peace among peoples, for the abolition of all forms of slavery, for the respect and dignity of every human being and for the care of creation.”<sup>8</sup>

What I would submit, therefore, by way of providing a deeply personal and distinctly ecumenical background for the papal encyclical letter on creation care issued by Pope Francis in 2015 is that it had long been anticipated not only from an ecological perspective, but also in the context of inter-Christian openness and exchange between two contemporary religious leaders, who are sincerely and steadfastly committed to restoring communion between their two churches, which Constantinople likes to characterize as “sister churches”<sup>9</sup> and Rome is fond of describing as “two lungs” breathing together.<sup>10</sup>

### **Dialogue as Compassion: An Act of Responsibility**

If commitment to communion is what has attracted Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to a joint ecumenical witness in a world otherwise divided by political and economic tensions as well as by religious and racial conflicts, then responsibility for compassion is undoubtedly what continues to impel them toward a shared

unease for the exploitation of people and of the planet, both of whom they consider to be living members and sacred traces of the body of Christ.

Yet critics have denounced Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for consistently castigating the deliberate or indifferent degradation of the environment as sinful. The Patriarch's encyclical of 1994 was the first time that any religious leader had identified harming the environment with committing sin. Later, in a public address in 1997, the Patriarch stated even more unequivocally:

To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation . . . for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping it of its forests, or by destroying its wetlands . . . for humans to injure other humans with disease and contaminate Earth's waters, land and air with poisonous substances . . . these are sins.<sup>11</sup>

The Patriarch's audience at the time included US Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, representing President Bill Clinton, as well as oceanographic explorer Jean-Michel Cousteau and the Sierra Club's Executive Director Carl Pope. The last of these still acknowledges that this event was his first striking encounter with the intersection of faith and the environment.

The Patriarch's undiluted words undoubtedly represented a radical, indeed revolutionary shift in emphasis on a subject that was so fundamental to theology and at the same time has proved so objectionable to the average layperson. A national environmental news journal in the United States, *Greenwire*,<sup>12</sup> highlighted the Patriarch's radical words as the "quote of the day"! Of course, it was much more than this, and people very soon became aware of it. Bruce Babbitt declared that the pronouncement would be seen in the future as one of the seminal religious statements of our time. And Larry Stammer, religion and environment writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, described it as "an unprecedented religious defense of the environment . . . the first time that a major international religious leader has explicitly linked environmental problems with sinful behavior."<sup>13</sup>

Such a radical statement of faith and revolutionary concept of sin are far removed from any enterprise of ecological terrorizing or political fear-mongering, of which the Ecumenical Patriarch is stereotypically accused by detractors.<sup>14</sup> Over the centuries, but especially during the Middle Ages, sin has undoubtedly been perceived and promoted through the very narrow lens of transgression, which added an exclusively legalistic and moralistic dimension to the notion of wrongdoing and culpability. Instead of defining sin as a breakdown in relationships—whether among people, between people and the planet, or with God—it was reduced to a list of transgressions or misdemeanors before a sadistic, stringent father figure somewhere in the distant heavens.

Of course, nowadays, it is scarcely acceptable to speak of sin. Sin fatigue has led to a dilution and demolition of the notion of sin. In the words of Richard Dawkins: "The Christian focus is overwhelmingly on sin sin sin sin sin sin. What a nasty little preoccupation to have dominating your life."<sup>15</sup> Ironically, although surely not incidentally, Dawkins repeats the word seven times, wittingly or unwittingly perhaps echoing the medieval concept of seven deadly vices.

It is true that theologians have for far too long focused on the individual implications of sin. However, the environmental crisis reminds us of its cosmic consequences and global connotations, which are more than merely social, spiritual, or psychological. Every act of exploitation, pollution, or destruction of the natural environment is an offense against God. In *A History of Sin*,<sup>16</sup> John Portmann of the University of Virginia includes “harming the environment” as one of the “modern sins,” even quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.<sup>17</sup> As we have already seen, in *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis twice acknowledges this unprecedented and unusual notion of ecological sin advanced by the Patriarch.<sup>18</sup>

For almost thirty years, then, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has emphasized the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis and even introduced the revolutionary concept of ecological sin by way of expanding our understanding of repentance from what we have hitherto considered purely as an individual wrongdoing or social transgression to a much broader, communal, generational, and even environmental abuse of God’s creation.

After all, what else is repentance or conversion of attitudes and actions other than the openness to patient dialogue with others and the readiness to humbly confess that the world is larger than any one of us—more complex than any single perspective, and more beautiful than we could ever imagine? What else is the refusal or rejection of dialogue other than the stifling ignorance of the image and likeness of God in every human being or the imperceptiveness and insensitivity to the presence of God in every Christian confession and religious community—in the last grain of sand and the least speck of dust throughout God’s creation?

It is moreover not coincidental that, since his election, the Pope assumed the name of St. Francis of Assisi as an unmistakable indication of his priority for and sensitivity to the marginalized, the vulnerable, the oppressed in our global community, and nature. This is why, in his recent encyclical, he encourages us to pray: “O God, bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it . . . Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor of the earth.”

### **Dialogue as Cooperation: An Act of Caring**

What the papal encyclical *Laudato Si’* has reminded us so powerfully and permanently is that preserving nature and serving neighbor are inseparable; they resemble two sides of the same coin. In fact, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew have repeatedly underlined the profound connection between environmental justice and social justice, declaring their solidarity with people suffering from war and persecution, as well as poverty and hunger. The two religious leaders have, from the very outset of their institutional and individual relations, demonstrated that they understand the role of the church. They know what matters, or at least what should matter, in the church; and they understand what the responsibility, priority, and ministry of the church should be in the contemporary world.

Theological dialogues and ecumenical relations are of paramount importance, but admittedly they are often carried out in order to gain something, whether to achieve greater clarity or advance toward fuller unity; in the minds of some, they may even misguidedly look to manipulation or mastery. Nevertheless, on April 16, 2016, the visit to the island of Lesbos in Greece by Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew—accompanied

by the local host Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece—was in fact aimed at giving something: namely, hope to the hundreds of detainees and desperate refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa.

In this regard, the event in Lesbos, which received international attention, indicated a practical and pastoral response by the churches of the East and West to a tragic crisis in our world. At the same time, it marked a powerful reassessment of how ecumenical relations can advance human rights at a time when the world is either turning its face away from the victims of religious extremism and persecution or else deciding their fate on exclusively financial terms and national interests.

The power of ecumenism lies in beginning to open up beyond ourselves and our own, our communities and our churches. It is learning to speak the language of care and compassion. It is giving priority to solidarity and service. This was highlighted at the launching of *Laudato Si'*, where—beyond the theological and spiritual dimensions of the ecological crisis—Metropolitan John also underlined the ecumenical and existential significance of the papal encyclical, noting that it contains “an important ecumenical dimension in that it brings the divided Christians before a common task which they must face together.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Dialogue as Inspiration: An Act of Example**

I believe that it is hardly coincidental but indeed quite providential that these two bishops are leading their respective churches at this critical moment in time. And it is also a unique blessing that they relate so comfortably and confidently with each other. As in the case of relations between Patriarch Bartholomew and Popes John Paul II (in Venice, June 2002) and Benedict XVI (in Istanbul, November 2006), Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis have issued joint statements—in Jerusalem (June 2014) and Istanbul (November 2014)—drawing attention to the plight of Christians in the Middle East, but also an exceptional statement in September 2017 highlighting the importance and impact of climate change. On that occasion, their “Joint Message on the World Day of Prayer for Creation” was an “urgent appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and to support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation.”

Of course, major changes in mindsets and worldviews are no more rapidly accepted and adopted in human societies than in natural settings. In fact, human beings are sometimes less prone to rapid conversion than geological fault-lines or tectonic plates are to sudden shifts. This is especially true of religious institutions and political parties, where acceptance or adjustment is “traditionally” sluggish and sometimes frustratingly stagnant. This may well be why so much—sometimes unreasonable, perhaps unrealistic—hope is placed on the shoulders of religious leaders, such as Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It was possibly the reason why the June 2015 papal encyclical was received with such fervor—and at the same time challenged with such ferocity—in religious and secular circles alike. Would it create a sudden shift in thinking about climate change? Could it convince deniers and disdainers that the problem was real and that religion should be part of the solution?

Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt in my mind that the favorable reception—and, in fact, at the same time I would also venture to add: the adverse reaction to and harsh criticism—of their advancing and advocating for the care and protection of our planet is arguably the greatest testimony and evidence that Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis are most definitely on the right track. Their dialogue for creation is undoubtedly creating reverberations throughout the world among believing and secular people alike.

For this reason alone, these two global religious leaders deserve both our prayer and praise, while their enlightened example and instruction merit our attention, promulgation, and implementation. In time, perhaps each of us can become examples transformed in our respect and care for the cosmos that God reconciled and transfigured out of infinite love.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, Cardinal Turkson became the first prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, which replaced the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

<sup>2</sup> See Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, “Metropolitan Zizioulas: ‘Laudato Si’ is an occasion of great joy and satisfaction for the Orthodox,” *La Stampa* (June 19, 2015) <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/06/18/vaticaninsider/metropolitan-zizioulas-laudato-si-is-an-occasion-of-great-joy-and-satisfaction-for-the-orthodox-9OC5q2xdD2pJqXY3ArkqzI/pagina.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Three days earlier, the encyclical was leaked to the Italian press, possibly by critics of Pope Francis within the Vatican.

<sup>4</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew similarly draws attention to the groundbreaking initiative of his immediate predecessor Patriarch Demetrios (1914–1991), who established September 1<sup>st</sup> as a world day of prayer in the Orthodox Church for the protection of the natural environment with his celebrated encyclical on September 1, 1989. See John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012, 23–25.

<sup>5</sup> June 18, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See Demetrios Tsakonas, *A Man Sent by God: The Life of Patriarch Athenagoras*, Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1977, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of Morning.” See *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*, New York: Random House, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Cited from *Catholic News Agency*, November 30, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> A phrase dating back to Ignatius of Antioch in the first century of the Christian era. See Will Cohen, *The Concept of “Sister Churches” in Catholic-Orthodox Relations Since Vatican II*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017, 10.

<sup>10</sup> A phrase coined by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism*, Paragraph 54 (May 25, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Bartholomew address in Santa Barbara, California, 1997, in *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011, 99. Also see “Exclusive: Patriarch Bartholomew on Pope Francis’ Climate Encyclical,” <http://time.com/3926076/pope-francis-encyclical-patriarch-bartholomew>.

<sup>12</sup> *Greenwire*, November 10, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, November 9, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> See Fr. Michael Butler and Andrew Morriss, *Creation and the Heart of Man: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on Environmentalism*, Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, Amazon Digital Services, 2013, 7 and 63, where the authors—both of them Orthodox Christians and one of them even an Orthodox clergyman!—instruct the leader of the Orthodox Church on the biblical and patristic roots of their approach, while advising Orthodox readers to “reject the tendency toward apocalyptic rhetoric among many environmentalists.” See also the editor of their book, Dylan Pahman, in his “Climate Change, the Green Patriarch, and the Disposition of Fear,” *First Things*, December 3, 2013, who accuses the Patriarch for “using the tragedy [of ecological disaster] to advocate for a political cause through a disposition of fear.”

<sup>15</sup> See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 252.



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<sup>16</sup> John Portman, *A History of Sin: its evolution to today and beyond*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>18</sup> See especially paragraphs 8 and 9 (quoted above).

<sup>19</sup> See *Vatican Insider*, footnote 2 above.

# Response to “Integral Ecology and Ecumenical Integrity”

By Rev. Ronald T. Kunkel, S.Th.D.

In 1998, while a seminarian studying in Rome, I had the opportunity to participate in a pilgrimage to Greece and Turkey with a group of brother seminarians and priests. One of the highlights of that pilgrimage was the opportunity to be received in audience by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. My fellow pilgrims and I were grateful for the honor of meeting the Ecumenical Patriarch, and for the wonderful hospitality, the warmth and graciousness with which he received us. I therefore consider it a particular blessing to share some reflections in response to the presentation given this morning by Archdeacon John as part of this annual Cardinal Meyer Lecture series.

## Retrieving the First Movement of the Christian Symphony

As an avid concertgoer and a lover of music, one of the great joys for me of living in the Chicago area is the opportunity from time to time to attend performances by a world class orchestra. During its current concert season, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is performing each of the nine symphonies of Beethoven, seminal works in the history of music irrespective of genre. A classical symphony is an orchestral composition, usually in four movements. Each movement has its own particular characteristics with respect to tone, tempo, and melody, and possesses a certain integrity in its own right. Yet, an individual movement finds its fullest expression only within the whole, and the symphony is only complete when all four movements are present.

I believe the symphony is a fitting metaphor when reflecting on the Christian faith. Christianity can be seen as the master work of the triune God, consisting of four elements, or movements, each of which is essential in understanding the whole. These four movements consist of Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and Fulfillment. Creation is the first (and a necessary) stage of the Divine Economy. However, in the life of the Church, until fairly recently, this first movement, the doctrine of creation, had largely receded into the background, mostly taken for granted by theologians, pastors and laypeople. There are some exceptions, notably St. Francis of Assisi, but for the most part creation had ceased to be a major theme in theological reflection or a significant concern in the daily lives of the faithful. However, a significant shift began to occur in the modern era. In a period fueled by scientific and technological advances, the Industrial Revolution, and the movement toward globalization, the impacts upon the environment, human health, families, and local communities and cultures began to be better understood and taken more seriously. In the twentieth century, Christian leaders of nearly all confessions began to focus greater attention on environmental issues, anchored in the biblical witness regarding creation and the understanding of the human person.

Since the very beginning of his pontificate in 2013 all the way through the recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis has made the retrieval of the first movement of the Christian symphony a priority in his preaching and teaching. Building upon the work of his predecessors as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has played a vitally important role in bringing the authentic Christian doctrine of creation and its implications back to the attention of the faithful. As Archdeacon John has eloquently demonstrated in his lectures, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has done likewise in his ministry and mission.

## The Gospel of Creation

In the encyclical letter *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, published in 2015, Pope Francis dedicates the second chapter of the text to a consideration of what he terms “The Gospel of Creation.” He writes that “It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions” (LS 64). Francis proceeds to provide a summation of the biblical witness regarding creation. Reflecting upon the goodness of creation and the unique and immense dignity of every human person as created in God’s image and likeness, Francis observes “Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!” (LS 65). The integral ecology of Pope Francis is thus connected with an integral anthropology, which views the human person in terms of his or her relationality. This relationality is not a mere capacity for communion, but rather understands communion with God, with our brothers and sisters, and with the entirety of the created world as representing the full actualization of the human person.

For Pope Francis, the antithesis of communion is sin, which causes alienation and ruptures relationships at every level. As Archdeacon John noted, sin may be defined as “a breakdown in relationships.” The stories of Cain and Abel and Noah and the flood provide the basis for Francis to observe:

Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered.

These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others (LS 70).

Pope Francis notes that while “nature” is typically viewed as a system which can be controlled, the biblical and theological category of “creation” reflects not only a belief in God as the source of all that is, but human life and the universe in which we find ourselves as a gift, freely given in love. We are called to receive this gift with gratitude, to care for it, to cultivate and nourish it. This is the spirit of stewardship, through which we exercise the responsibility given to us to exercise dominion over creation. This “dominion” is not reflected in the brutal subjugation of creation according to our own interests or desires, but rather a careful discernment of God’s plan and that which will promote the common good. Created in God’s image, we are to serve as his ambassadors, his representatives to the world around us. The vocation to be good stewards of all of God’s gifts must transcend our political affiliations or narrow ideologies.

In further developing the intrinsic relationship between integral ecology and integral anthropology, Pope Francis offers a rich perspective on the human person:

Human beings, even if we postulate a process of evolution, also possess a uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by the evolution of other open systems. Each of us has his or her own personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology. The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes the direct action of God and a particular call to life and relationship on the part of a 'Thou' who addresses himself to another 'thou.' The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object" (LS 81).

The doctrine of creation, as our understanding of the human person in particular, ultimately, must be viewed in a Christological key or lens. Indeed, the biblical testimony affirms that the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Word, is the beginning, the center and the goal of creation. The prologue of the Gospel of John, using the very phrase which commences the Book of Genesis, proclaims:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us... (Jn 1:1-3, 14).

Paul takes up this theme in the Letter to the Colossians: "He is image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:15-17).

Pope Francis highlights this Christological lens. He writes: "In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning... One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross" (LS 99).

The integral ecology reflected in the teachings and witness of both Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. Retrieving the sometimes neglected "first movement" of the Christian symphony, it is anchored in the richness of the biblical vision of creation and the human person, both understood in their fullness through the light of Jesus Christ. The call to take seriously the shared responsibility for the care of our common home is one that should unite all Christians, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, as well as people of other religious traditions and all those of good will. May each of us reflect on our own response to this call, giving witness to the loving God who created us, redeemed us and offers us the fullness of life.

# **On Earth as in Heaven: Toward an Ecological Ethos and Worldview**

By Rev. Archdeacon John Chrysavgis, Ph.D.

## **Introduction: The Sixth Day of Creation**

Permit me to take you on a journey . . . back to what churches and theologians like to call “the beginning.” This would be their preferred starting point for speaking about the environment. Yet, whenever people think of the Genesis story, they focus on themselves, on our creation by a loving God and forget our connection to our environment. Whether this is a natural reaction or a sign of arrogance, the truth is that Christians tend to overemphasize our creation “in the image and likeness of God” (Gn. 1:26) and overlook our creation from “the dust of the ground” (2:7). I would claim that our “heavenliness” should not overshadow our “earthliness.” Most people are unaware that we humans did not get a day to ourselves in the creation account. In fact, we shared that “sixth day” with the creeping and crawling things of the world (1:24–26). We don’t *have* to talk about human beings in exceptional or hubristic terms; perhaps our uniqueness lies simply in our peculiar relationship to nature.<sup>1</sup> The creation story—just as the Noah story—tell us that saving humanity is inseparable from saving other creatures. It is helpful—and humble—to recall this truth.

In recent years, of course, we have been painfully reminded of our egocentric reality resulting in cruel flora and fauna extinction, irresponsible soil and forest clearance, and unacceptable noise, air, and water pollution. Still, our concern for the environment cannot be reduced to superficial or sentimental love. It is a way of honoring our creation by God, of hearing the “groaning of creation” (Rm. 8:22). It should be an affirmation of the truth of that sixth day of creation. Anything less than the truth—the full truth and nothing but the truth—is dangerous heresy.

And speaking of “heresy” in assessing the ecological crisis is not far-fetched at all. For whenever we speak of heavenly or earthly things, we are drawing on established values of ourselves and the world. The technical language we adopt or the particular “species” we preserve, all of these depend on principles that we promote, even presume. We tend to call our predicament an “*ecological* crisis.” But the root of the problem lies in the paradigms that impel us to pursue a particular lifestyle. The crisis concerns the way we *imagine* our world. It is essentially a battle over images and icons.

In classical traditions, human beings regarded themselves as descendant from God (or the gods). They looked on the world as soul-ful, not soul-less; as sacred (like them), not subjected (to them). In their experience, every flower, every bird, every star was holy. The sap of trees was their lifeblood. Nature was not for experimentation or exploitation; and trade was never at the expense of nature.

So, when I consider the experience of my tradition, the Orthodox Church, I turn to its distinct symbols and values, which include icons (as the way we view and perceive creation); liturgy (as the way we celebrate and respond to creation); and asceticism (as the way we respect and treat creation). Early Christian mystics recognized that, when our eyes are opened to the beauty of the world, then “we can perceive everything in the light of the Creator God”<sup>2</sup> and discern the face of God on the face of the world.<sup>3</sup>



## The Iconic Vision of Nature

Seeing clearly is precisely what icons teach us to do. The world of the icon reveals the eternal dimension in all that we see and experience. Our generation, it may be said, is characterized by a sense of self-centeredness toward the natural cosmos and a lack of awareness of the beyond. When Noah saved the animals two-by-two, he wasn't saving specimens or species but an entire ecosystem! We have *broken* that covenant between ourselves and our world.

In Orthodox spirituality, the icon reflects the restoration of that sacred covenant. It reminds us of another world; it speaks in this world the language of the age to come. The icon provides a corrective to a culture that gives value only to the here and now. It aspires to the inner vision of all, the world as created and intended by God. And the first image attempted by an iconographer is the Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor. Because the iconographer strives to hold together this world and the next. By disconnecting this world from heaven, we desacralize both.

This is where the teaching about Jesus Christ, at the very heart of iconography, emerges. In the icon of Jesus Christ, the uncreated God assumes a human face, a "beauty that can save the world," as Dostoevsky says.<sup>4</sup> And in Orthodox icons, faces are frontal; they always depict two eyes gazing back at the beholder. The conviction is that Christ is in our midst (Matt. 1.23). Profile signifies sin; it implies rupture. Faces are "all eyes,"<sup>5</sup> profoundly receptive, eternally susceptible of divine grace. "I see" means that "I am seen," which means that I am in love. Remember the title of C.S. Lewis's love story: *Till We Have Faces*.<sup>6</sup> Love compels us to see things from another perspective, from the perspective of another. Ecology is much more than the flora and fauna; it is about the social nexus that surrounds them.

The icon, then, converts the beholder from a restricted worldview to a fuller vision. The light of icons is the light of reconciliation. It is not the waning light of this world; it "knows no evening," to quote an Orthodox hymn. And so, icons depicting events that occurred in daytime are no brighter than icons depicting events that occurred at nighttime. For example, the icon of the sorrowful descent from the Cross is no darker than the icon of Ascension; the icon of the Nativity no brighter than that of the Crucifixion; the somber light of the Last Supper mirrors that of the supreme feast of light, the Transfiguration.

This is because the icon presupposes a "different way of life," as Orthodox Christians sing on Easter Sunday. Indeed, the entire world is a ladder or an icon; "everything is a sign of God," as a second-century mystic, Irenaeus of Lyon, said.<sup>7</sup> Which is why in icons, rivers assume a human form, as do the sun and the moon and the stars and the waters. They all have human faces; they all acquire a personal dimension—just like us; just like God.

The destruction of our planet's ecosystems and resources can only be restrained if we begin to see nature as an icon. Take any painting: The narcissist will see a wooden frame; if he is cold, he will burn it to keep warm. An altruist will see a sacred canvas as sacred; she will admire it and recall the uniqueness of the artist: Rembrandt or van Gogh. Only when our attitude to the painting changes will we value it. So, if the world is an icon, nothing lacks sacredness. Put bluntly: If God is not visible in creation, then neither is God invisible in heaven.

## The Liturgy of Nature

What icons achieve in space, liturgy accomplishes in song: the same ministry of reconciliation between heaven and earth. If icons are an artistic means for the created world to remain in communication with the uncreated God, then liturgy is an aesthetic medium for our world to reach communion with its Creator. It is a way of reconciliation or what theologians like to call at-one-ment. In fact, the Greek word for reconciliation and forgiveness (*synchoresis*) implies being in the same place with everyone else, which of course is precisely what happens during liturgy.

By liturgical, I do not imply ritual; I mean relational. Or, in the context again of icons, we should think of the world as a picture: one requires every part of an image in order for it to be complete. Removing one part of the picture—whether a tree, an animal, or a human being—distorts the entire picture. If we are guilty of relentless waste, it is because we have lost the spirit of worship. We are no longer respectful pilgrims; we have become mere tourists. We must restore a sense of awe and delight in our relationship to the world.

The truth is that we respond to nature with the same delicacy, the very same sensitivity and tenderness, with which we respond to any human person. We have learned that we cannot treat people like things; let me propose to you today that we must learn not to treat even things like mere things. All of our spiritual activities are measured by their impact on the world, on people, especially the poor.

So, liturgy is the language that commemorates and celebrates the innate and intimate connection between God, people and things—what Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century called a “cosmic liturgy”;<sup>8</sup> what in the same century Isaac the Syrian described as acquiring:

A merciful heart, which burns with love for the whole of creation—for humans, for birds, for the beasts, even for demons—for all God’s creatures.

And in the early twentieth century, Fyodor Dostoevsky conveyed the same vision in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

Love all God’s creation, . . . every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.<sup>9</sup>

There is a dimension of art and music in the world. Which also implies that whenever we narrow life (political life; social life; even religious life) to ourselves and our own interests, we are neglecting our vocation to reconcile all of creation. Because our relationship with this world determines our relationship with heaven; the way we treat the earth is reflected in the way that we pray to God.

## The Body of the World or the World of Asceticism

Of course, unless you live in Maine, this world does not always look or feel like heaven. And in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 or British Petroleum’s oil disaster a year before, it was somewhat difficult to perceive what Dostoevsky called “the divine mystery in things.” How, then, do we reconcile this mystery with reality?

For Eastern Christian theology, the answer lies in a tree, as John Chrysostom observed in the fourth century,<sup>10</sup> commenting on Paul's Letter to the Colossians: "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through the blood of his cross" (1:20). Reference here to "the blood of the cross" is an indication of the cost involved when we fail to recognize the sacredness of creation. It reminds us of the reality of human failure and the radical reversal required in our perspectives and practices.

There is a price to pay for our wasting. The balance of the world has been shattered; and the ecological crisis will not be solved merely with smiley stickers. The "tree of the cross" presents self-denial as an antidote to self-centeredness.<sup>11</sup> The cross is not an empty symbol or costume jewelry; it is an expression of brokenness, a confession of failure. This may be why some are in denial about climate change—either claiming it as a hoax or assuming it can be fixed with Band-aid solutions.

In Orthodox spirituality, the cross translates into asceticism: a way of assuming responsibility for one's actions and one's world. It is vital to look in the mirror and ask: Is what I have what I need? Did I travel here on a plane to deliver an address on the environment? How do I reflect the world's thirst for oil or greed that is destroying the planet?

Of course, the earth keeps reminding us of our denial. Yet we stubbornly refuse to accept that our comfortable lives, dependent on cheap energy, are somehow responsible for the millions of gallons of oil polluting the Gulf of Mexico. How can we logically believe that a century of pumping oil-fired pollution into the atmosphere has no ramification?

And asceticism is more than self-discipline. It is learning to be free, uncompelled by ways that we use the world; characterized by self-control and the ability to say "no" or "enough." Asceticism aims not at detachment or destruction, but at refinement and restoration. Take the example of fasting. Learning to fast is learning to give and not simply give up; it is learning to share. It is recognizing in other people faces and in the earth the face of God.<sup>12</sup>

And here, I think, lies the heart of the problem. For we are unwilling—quite frankly; we violently resist any call—to adopt simpler lives. Everyone in this room is guilty of consuming far more than we should, far more than someone in Malawi. We should recover a spirituality of simplicity and frugality, living in a way that promotes harmony, not division; acknowledging "the earth as the Lord's" (Ps. 23:1).

### **Images of Food and Fish**

In fact, food—in its corollary vices of greed or gluttony and its concomitant symptoms of indifference or waste—comprises the most striking factor in ecological exploitation and economic inequity. The reason people go hungry today is not the number of people in the world. If there were fewer people but the way we distribute food remained the same, the poor would still go hungry. The problem is the way we distribute food through the free market, as private poverty, which people who are poor cannot afford.

There are three particular images in the Orthodox Christian tradition that speak to our response to the ecological crisis. In the first—derived from the Gospel parable—Jesus tells of a poor man, Lazarus, who lay at the gate of a rich man, "longing to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table" (Lk 16:21). The rich man never once invited Lazarus to his table. What is worse, the rich man probably never even noticed Lazarus. I wonder sometimes whether we even notice what goes on around us. How many

people do we invite to sit at our table? What issues—poverty or peace, healthcare or human rights—do we readily embrace? Or, to paraphrase a contemporary politician: Perhaps the time has come to admit the problem lies with those who gorge themselves. The problem is not the immigrant. The problem is not any particular religion. The problem is the insatiable greed of some, who incessantly stuff themselves, and this problem has a face and a name!

In another well-known scriptural and iconographic depiction, sitting under the shade of the oak trees at Mamre, Abraham welcomed an unexpected visit from three strangers. The story is recorded in Genesis 18 (and Hebrews 13) and describes the Patriarch of Israel spontaneously sharing his friendship and food, extending such generous hospitality to the foreigners that—in my church’s theology—this scene is symbolical of the Holy Trinity. In fact, the only authentic image of God as Trinity in the Orthodox Church is this encounter scene from rural Palestine.

Traditional icons of “Abraham’s hospitality” portray the guests on three sides and leave an open space on the fourth side of the table. The scene is an open invitation. Of course, as then Senator Barack Obama told the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Fight for Freedom in 2005: “It’s one thing that everyone has a seat at the table, but how can everyone pay for the meal?” Think of Pope Francis during his visit to the US in 2015 declining a meal with the U.S. Congress and choosing to eat with the homeless in the neighboring park.

There is also a unique iconographic depiction of this worldview in an eighteenth-century icon at a monastery in Crete.<sup>13</sup> It is literally a theological statement in color. The icon’s title derives from the Great Blessing of the Waters at the Feast of Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup> and repeated during the baptism of every Orthodox: “Great are you, Lord, and wondrous are your works; no words suffice to hymn your wonders!”

At the far left of this image, nature is portrayed as “mother earth” that indigenous peoples throughout the world (Indians of North America and Aborigines of Australia) have respected for centuries. The epic poet Homer of ancient Greece writes: “She is the mother of all and oldest of all; she nourishes all creatures that walk on the land, move in the deep or fly in the air.”<sup>14</sup> So nature extends her arms in a gesture of openness and embrace. The icon also depicts urban life (the cities of Samaria and Nineveh are in the background) and agricultural life (with farmers tilling the slopes). We can see people and rivers and vegetation, while a vast rainbow reflects the eternal covenant between the Creator and creation.

While the icon is rich in symbolism, let me highlight two particular scenes. The first depicts Jonah cast from the mouth of a large sea beast, as in the biblical story—a profound image of resurrection and renewal of all things. One of the early symbols of Christ, whereby Christians recognized one another, was the fish—the Greek word (ΙΧΘΥΣ) being an acronym for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” The fish, then, is a statement of faith. Christ is integrally and inseparably identified with fish. Abuse of fishing or over-fishing relates in a personal and profound way to Christ.

The second scene depicts the slaying of Abel by Cain, a violent representation of the destructive impact of our current policies and practices on future generations. Until we perceive in the pollution of our planet the portrait of our *brother and sister*, we cannot resolve the injustice and inequality of our world. Until we discern in the pollution of our planet the face of our *children*, we will not comprehend the irreversible consequences of our actions.

## Conclusion: The Way Forward

I once accompanied my elder son to the optometrist. Alex is not as meticulous as he should be with his eye care. So, as he received his new prescription, I overheard his reaction: “Wow! *That’s* what I’m supposed to see?” When we look at our world, what do *we* see? Because the way we view our planet reflects how we relate to it. We *treat* our planet in a god-forsaken manner because we *see* it in this way.

In his now classic article entitled “The Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” medieval historian Lynn White Jr. (1907–87) already suspected this truth:

The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts. The Latins felt that sin was moral evil, that salvation lay in right conduct. The implications of Christianity for the conquest of nature would emerge more easily in the Western atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>

Far too often, we think that solving the ecological crisis is a matter of *acting* differently, more effectively or more sustainably.<sup>16</sup> I recall an article a few years ago, which I paraphrase for our purposes:

Yes, the world is sinking. And the band keeps playing: On the Titanic, first violinist, Big Oil’s Koch Brothers’ Empire. For them capitalism is the solution to everything; everyone has a price, especially politicians. Second chair, the world’s moral authority, Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis warning we are destroying the planet. And playing a mean solo flute, Mother Nature, who doesn’t care what climate change deniers think, but only what we do.<sup>17</sup>

Handing climate change over to capitalism is as good an idea as asking the iceberg to fix the Titanic. Paradoxically, ecological correction begins with environmental in-action. It is a matter of contemplation, of *seeing* things differently. We are back to the notion of icons. First, we must *stop* what we are *doing*. Then we might gain new “in-sight” into our world.

Peering through this lens, foreign policy and the economy actually *look* different, permitting us to abandon the urge for unbridled expansion and focus on the sustainability we desperately need. We can see the world in ways other than through the glass of the market; there actually *can* be a green way of looking at the world apart from that of Alan Greenspan, former chair of the Federal Reserve of the US.

Some years ago, I recall that Larry Summers, then presidential advisor and World Bank economist declared: “America cannot and will not accept any ‘speed limit’ on economic growth.” Have we become so addicted to fantasies about riches without risk or profit without price? What is it about the model of life we have tragically created that we override our own better judgment in service of our selfish nature? Do we honestly believe that our endless, mindless manipulation of the earth’s resources comes at no cost or consequence? Our economy and technology become toxic when divorced from our vocation to see the world as God would. And if God saw the world as “very good” on that sixth day of creation, then we too can see the world in its unfathomable beauty and interrelatedness.

What we face is a radical choice, like Moses offered in Deuteronomy: “For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to



us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. Today, I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death . . . Choose life!’ (Dt. 30:11–19)

The question I leave you with is this: How do we live in such a way that reflects spiritual values, that communicates generosity and gratitude, not arrogance and greed? Because if we don’t, then a significant patch of the Gulf Coast will have been lost in vain; and the Fukushima nuclear disaster precipitated by the tsunami will have gone unnoticed. But if we do, we will hear the earth groan, we will notice the grass grow, and we will feel the seal’s heartbeat.

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<sup>1</sup> Even the so-called dominion texts, falsely if not willfully construed as authorizing human control over the rest of creation, must be interpreted in light of human responsibility toward creation. We are called to care for the land (Lev. 25:1–5), for animals (Deut. 25:4), and wildlife (Deut. 22:6). For the interpretation of these “kingship” passages in the Church Fathers, cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* 2 PG 44.132; Basil of Caesarea, *On Psalm* 44, 12 PG 29.413; and Ambrose of Milan, *On the Gospel of Luke* IV, 28 PL 15.1620. For a contemporary analysis, see Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox perspectives on ecology*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009, 70–79.

<sup>2</sup> John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4, 58 PG 88.892–893.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Augustine, *On Psalm* 148, 15 PL 37.1946.

<sup>4</sup> F. Dostoevsky, in *The Idiot*, cited in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s 1970 Nobel Lecture: [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html). Accessed July 4, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See Bessarion, 11. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward, rev. ed (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, MI, 1984), 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, First published in 1956 (New York, NY: Harvest-Harcourt, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> See J.J. Johnson Leese, *Christ, Creation, and the Cosmic Goal of Redemption: A Study of Pauline Creation Theology as Read by Irenaeus and Applied to Ecotheology* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote in similar fashion, echoing Maximus Confessor’s image of the “cosmic liturgy.” See his *Mass On the World in Hymn of the Universe*, trans. G. Vann (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1972), 16: “Once again the fire has penetrated the earth . . . the flame has lit up the whole world from within.”

<sup>9</sup> See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), chapter 41, 339.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *On the Creation of the World* V, 7.

<sup>11</sup> See Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* 3 PG 76.929.

<sup>12</sup> On fasting and joyful gratitude, see Basil of Caesarea, *Homily 4 On Giving Thanks*, in *Saint Basil the Great, On Fasting and Feasting*, trans. Susan Holman and Mark DelCogliano (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 97–122.

<sup>13</sup> The iconographer is Ioannis Kornaros (1745–1796) and the icon is found at the Monastery of Toplou.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Homeric Hymns*, transl. Apostolos Athanassakis (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Lynn Townsend White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967), 1207.

<sup>16</sup> See Christos Yannaras and Norman Russell, “Conversation with Norman Russell,” in *Metaphysics as a Personal Adventure* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2017), 120.

<sup>17</sup> Paraphrase of article by Paul Farrell, “Planet Earth is the Titanic, climate change is the iceberg,” *The Wall Street Journal* (February 16, 2015).

# Response to “On Earth as in Heaven”

By Rev. Robert Schoenstene, SSL

In the Masoretic Text, Ruth appears in the last section of the Hebrew Bible, called the Ketubim, the Writings or Scriptures. Ruth is one of the five *megilloth* or scrolls that are read on festivals. Currently, Ruth is read on the Feast of Weeks, in Hebrew *Shabuoth*, in Greek, *Pentecost*. Since Weeks is a harvest festival, the connection of the book with the feast is clear in the story of Ruth’s gleaning of the fields after the harvest. Christian bibles usually move Ruth to a position between Judges and I Samuel. This placement of the book shows an interest in the descent of David traced in the story through Ruth and Boaz.

This short book is of great interest both literarily and theologically. It rebuts the post-exilic position of ethnic purity espoused in Ezekiel and Ezra by blatantly making the grandmother of David, the model of kingship and prototype of the post-exilic messiah king not only a foreigner, but a detested Moabite. It is one of the examples of the biblical way of addressing problematic areas by means of a discussion among the texts, in which there is not simply a definite resolution of a problem, but rather the presentation of both sides of a question, often in different books, leaving a state of tension without a full resolution.

In the story, Ruth the Moabite is faithful to her mother-in-law Naomi after the death of Naomi’s husband and two sons, one of whom was married to Ruth. The women move to Bethlehem, where Ruth gleaned grain in the field of Boaz, whom she will eventually marry. The act of gleaning, and Boaz’s generosity in allowing Ruth to glean more grain than usual is prominent in the story. It is an illustration of the Pentateuchal commandments to leave grain or fruit for the poor. Landowners were not to harvest all of the crops from a field or orchard; some of it had to be left to feed the poor.

These commands are found in three books of the Pentateuch: twice in Leviticus, and in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Within Leviticus, the commands in 19:9-10 and 25:1-7 are part of the Holiness Code (chapters 17 – 26). The Holiness Code is a post-exilic assemblage of laws that help define the concept of Israel as a holy people, the phrase “You shall be holy, as I, YHWH your God am holy,” (Lev. 19:2) has given the name by which this law code is known. The Holiness Code conceives Israel as a separated people, as God’s intrinsic holiness separates him from anything created. The holiness of Israel is evidenced in both moral and ritual activities. The Holiness Code is a priestly attempt to set up the parameters of a holy society, that is, a social structure that reflects the holiness of the Lord who took them out of the slavery of Egypt and re-formed them while they were in exile in Babylon.

Verses 9 and 10 of chapter 19 read: “And when you harvest the harvest of your land (‘arets), you shall not complete reaping the corners of your field, and the gleaning of your harvest you shall not gather. And your vineyard you shall not strip, the broken (branches) of your vineyard you shall not reap; for the poor and the migrant you shall leave them; I am YHWH your God.” The concern here is that the land (‘arets) is not simply a possession of the landowner, but the source of sustenance for the community, including the poor (<ani) and the *ger*, the migrant or sojourner. There are social responsibilities that go with the possession of land that are part of the holiness of the covenant community. God’s concern for the poor is to be reflected in Israel’s concern, it is a form of holiness.

Even the landowners are commanded to become gleaners every seven years. The Sabbath is considered not simply a day for human beings to rest, Exodus 20:8-11 includes “you, your son

or your daughter, your servant, your maid, your cattle and the migrant who is within your gates.” Leviticus, in commanding a sabbatical year, extends the rest to the land in Leviticus 25:1-7: “...the land shall keep a Sabbath unto YHWH; six years shall you sow your field and six years shall you prune your vineyard and gather its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath, a sabbath year of YHWH for the land, you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard...” Similarly, for the Jubilee year, (Lev. 25:8-12), the land shall rest, no planting, pruning or gathering is allowed, other than “it is a jubilee, it shall be holy to you, you shall eat what it yields out of the field.” (Lev. 25:12) In 26:34ff one of the causes of the Babylonian Exile is said to be the failure to let the land have its sabbaths. The exile of Judah would serve as a time for the land to gain its lost sabbath rests. The Holiness Code has combined elements of earlier laws of agricultural rest found in the Elohist Covenant Code and the expunging of debts found in the Deuteronomistic laws into a sabbatical year that exhibits holiness through both generosity to the poor and allowing the land to rest.

The Covenant Code in Exodus comprises chapters 20:22-23:33. This is generally considered to be one of the most ancient Hebrew law codes. In 23:10-11 the sabbath for the land is commanded. The reason for the command in the Covenant Code is that the poor may eat of their gleanings. “Six years shall you seed your land and gather its produce, and you shall let it fall and leave it in the seventh, and the poor of your people shall eat, and what remains the wild animals shall eat, thus shall you do to your vineyards and olive trees.” The weekly sabbath rest is directed in the following verse (12), and the verse preceding the command concerns not oppressing strangers, for “you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The Covenant Code ties the rest for the land with the social concern for the poor with the reminder that the Hebrews were poor migrants in the land of Egypt. The experience of salvation lies at both the treatment of the poor, strangers and aliens and the treatment of the land.

The Deuteronomistic tradition gained a prominent place in Judah during and after the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC). Josiah and his grandfather Hezekiah are the two great reforming kings of the Davidic house, both of whom were followed by descendants who overturned the reforms they instituted. Josiah’s reign is treated in II Kings 22:1-23:30. The reforms, principally against polytheism and its practices and institutions are at the heart of the Deuteronomistic tradition, represented in the Old Testament by the Book of Deuteronomy and the six books of the “Earlier Prophets,” Joshua through II Kings. The reforms began with the discovery of a scroll in a storeroom of the Jerusalem Temple, possibly having arrived there after the Assyrian Exile of Israel (722 BC), or perhaps even created for the occasion of the reform. The Deuteronomistic tradition has much in common with the prophetic tradition. It is uncompromisingly monotheistic and filled with concerns for justice, or righteousness, understood as being in right relationship with God, with other human beings and with creation.

The Deuteronomistic enterprise of forming a just society does not imply justice in the Aristotelean sense. The word we usually translate as “justice” or “righteousness,” *tsedeq* in Hebrew, has implications of “right relationship.” Hebrew thought is more relational than metaphysical. The relationship of God to Israel is demonstrated in *hesed*, a difficult word to translate; loving kindness, covenant fidelity, mercy, grace are all ways of rendering the word in English. It is at the heart of righteousness; it is a reflection of God’s justice, his right relationship to creation, and so, like holiness, is the basis of the ways that Israel behaves as a covenanted people. “It is mercy (*hesed*) I desire, and not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than holocausts.” (Hosea 6:6) The Sermon on the Mount demonstrates that the merciful generosity of a righteousness

“greater than that of the Scribes or the Pharisees” (Mt 5:20) is the source of living in a holy way, of becoming perfect as God himself is perfect in his generous kindness. (Mt 5:28)

In chapter 15 of Deuteronomy, a year of release is commanded every seven years, taking the place of the sabbatical year for the land found in the Elohist Covenant Code. The year of release is a remission of all debts accrued during the previous years. The commands of the year of release are preceded by a command to bring the tithes of produce every three years, so that the Levites, the poor and migrants may eat. The promise of the year of release is that poverty will be eliminated by following the commands to be generous. Similar to the laws in the Covenant Code, people who find themselves slaves are to be set free in the seventh year, furnished with the means to gain a livelihood, the Deuteronomic reason being that the Hebrews once were slaves in the land of Egypt, but were saved by the hand of God (Dt 15:15).

These sabbatical years probably have their origin in the biblical Sabbath, the day of rest occurring on the last day of the week. This unique Hebraic institution has no real parallel in the ancient world. The Mesopotamian *shappatu*, a rest day due to the reading of unlucky omens for the day, was important for the duties of the king, who was warned not to act on such a day because of the ill omens that pointed to failure in undertakings done or begun on that day. The king in Babylon was also the image and likeness of Marduk, the storm god and chief deity of the Babylonian state. The Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4a reflects and comments upon *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation epic which was recited and enacted in the *Akitu*, the Babylonian New Year Festival. The Priestly Source borrows the structure of the seven days of creation for its creation account, but replaces the king as the image and likeness of Marduk, the Babylonian creator god, with every human being, male and female, as the image and likeness of the one God. Similarly, the royal avoidance of acting on the *shappatu* becomes the culmination of the account with the *shabbath* of the seventh day, a day of rest both for God and His created image and likeness. The language of the commandment to keep the seventh day holy in the Decalogue in Exodus reflects the Priestly account in Genesis: “Remember the Day of Sabbath, to hallow it; six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for YHWH your God, you shall not do all your work, you, nor your son and your daughter, nor your servant and your maid, nor your cattle, nor the migrant within your gates. For in six days YHWH made the heavens, the land and the sea, and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day, therefore YHWH blessed the day of Sabbath and hallowed it.” (Ex 20:8-11)

The Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 is somewhat similar, but to the rest for cattle are added oxen and donkeys, and the reason for the seventh day rest is not remembrance of God’s creative act, but of salvation: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and YHWH your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, for that has YHWH your God commanded you to do the Day of Sabbath.” (Dt. 5:15) The conjunction of creation and salvation in the two accounts of the Decalogue is not simply a matter of two different traditions lying behind the two texts. Biblical theological thought often juxtaposes salvation and creation as the same thing. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, for example, God’s saving act of bringing back Judah from exile in Babylon is phrased in terms of creation, a new creation, as in 43:15-19:

I am YHWH your Holy One, Israel’s creator, your king,  
Thus says YHWH, who makes a way in the sea, a path through the mighty waters,  
Who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior,  
They lie down, they cannot arise, they are extinguished, put out like a wick,  
Remember not the earlier things, nor think on the things of old.  
Behold, I do something new, now it springs forth, do you not sense it?

The New Testament also combines the theme of salvation as a new creation. In the Synoptic Gospels, the public ministry of Jesus begins with his baptism in the Jordan. The description of the voice of God and the Spirit hovering over the waters echoes Genesis 1. Jesus then begins his preaching of the Kingdom of God, the new creation. The apocalyptic promise of a new heavens and a new earth is the redemptive recreation of the first heavens and earth. In Pauline thought, Christ is the new or second Adam, in the resurrection restoring the creation that was marred by sin. "For as through a man, death, so also through a man the resurrection of the dead. For just as in Adam all have died, so also in Christ shall all be made alive..." (I Cor 15:21-22)

The first man of Pauline thought is usually given the name Adam, although in the Priestly and Yahwistic creation accounts of Genesis 1-3 he does not have a name, he is simply ha-'adam, the man, with a definite article. His wife will receive a name, and his title, 'adam, will eventually be used as a name, but he is here the corporate representation of the human race, the medieval Everyman. The noun 'adam, human being, man, is akin to the word 'adamah, earth, ground. The Hebrew root behind both words refers to being red or ruddy. In the Yahwistic account the connection between human beings and the earth or ground is quite clear- "And YHWH God shaped the man, dust from the earth ('apar min ha'adamah), and he blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man was as a living creature." (Gen. 2: 7) At the end of the story, as the man and his wife are exiled from the Garden, the identification of humanity with the earth is made again, forming a nice *inclusio*, humanity beginning and ending as the earth, with the earth itself sharing in the fall from righteousness that is the eating of the fruit: "...cursed is the earth ('adamah) because of you, in toil shall you eat from it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field, by the sweat of your brow shall you eat food until you return to the ground (adamah), for you are dust and to dust shall you return." (Gen. 3:17b-19)

In Genesis, humanity is earth itself, earth with a consciousness that can reach out to God, who walks and talks with the man in the garden, earth with the consciousness that shares with God the naming of the animals, an action that implies a certain responsibility toward them, as humanity is to care for and cultivate the garden, earth with the consciousness that can know others like himself, earth with the consciousness that can find itself complete in unself-conscious relationships, particularly in marriage. It is also the consciousness that can find its ultimate fulfillment in the sabbath rest that God himself enjoys, and darkly, the consciousness that can turn narrowly inward, in a narcissistic decision to make oneself like a god, knowing good and evil, a consciousness that can bring about destruction and alienation, even the cursing of the ground, itself the material source of the man.

But where sin abounds, there grace abounds the more (Rom 5:20). The commandments were given as a grace, as a way for humanity to begin to see clearly through the vagaries of life, to life's meanings and its goals, and to its source; to be once again, despite the fall from righteousness, a righteous people, a society of justice. The sabbatical commands are a grace that allow humanity to come to realize that in the rest that implies letting go of control, the rest that remits debts and gives the poor sustenance, the rest that reveals to us that even with the price paid and a registered deed, humans cannot own themselves, their produce, or the land, that it is all God's, given as the gift that is earth to the earth shaped in God's image and likeness.

Commandments do not exist in a vacuum. They are not simply arbitrary rules given by an arbitrary king. In the Pentateuch, the commandments are gathered in law codes that are expressions of the Covenant, in collections of law codes that arose in various times in Israel's history and that were preserved, gathered and eventually canonized in the Post-Exilic period. The Priestly mind saw in these laws the proper way for Israel to know God's mercy and then how to respond to it.



Another way of expressing the Covenant can be seen in the prophetic literature, in lives that are centered in righteousness and fidelity, and yet another in the contemplative look at creation expressed in the wisdom literature. The Priestly mind expresses itself in *Torah*, a word that means Instruction rather than simply Law, as the means of communicating how the Covenant can be a lived reality. The word “Covenant” occurs for the first time in the Hebrew Bible in the story of Noah, a story of the re-creation of the world after an apocalyptic disaster. In Genesis 9, God’s recognition of human weakness is marked by a series of commands allowing the eating of meat, but not the partaking of blood. The Covenant, the *berith*, the binding of God with his creation and the binding of creation with itself and with God is stated in Genesis 9:9-10: “Behold, I am setting up my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, with birds, with cattle, and with all the beasts of the earth, from all coming forth from the ark, to every beast of the earth.” God’s answer to sin is to draw the sinful world close to himself, to “Bind it with cords of love.” (cf. Hos 11:4)

Jeremiah understands this covenant as a divine gift “written on the heart,” which will be understood as the knowledge of God. “...For they shall all know me, from the smallest of them to the greatest, oracle of YHWH, when I forgive their guilt, and their sin I remember no more.” (cf. Jer 31:31-34) The knowledge of God that this prophet speaks of is the same knowledge spoken of by an earlier prophet, Hosea, as God’s desire for the people of the covenant, “It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than holocausts.” (Hos 6:6) This knowledge of God as mercy lies at the heart of the New Covenant in the Christ. It is also at the heart of the Christian understanding of the covenant. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, and behold, the new has come.” (II Cor 5:17) And yet this new creation is not an abrupt break with the old, “For it is the God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ who has shone in our hearts through the face of Christ to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”. (II Cor 4:6) The new creation is seeing God’s original creation in a new way, through understanding that in Christ grace and mercy abound in the place of sin, and that the generosity of God’s righteousness is ultimately the knowledge of God that is necessary to have the knowledge of living as creatures in a created and redeemed world. In the story of the Garden, the *adam*, the image and likeness of God, forsook the tree of life, Wisdom, (cf. Prov. 3:18) for the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and ended in the corruption of a disfigured world. Redemption, the redemption and renewal of the corrupted world is the realm of that Wisdom which is the knowledge of God. If all things in heaven and on earth have been reconciled to God in Christ (cf. Col. 1:15-20), then all things are made new (Apoc. 21:5). In a redeemed world, the original role of humanity as those who take care of and cultivate the Garden, who relate to God in the kenosis of the sabbath rest, has been restored by the one who makes all things new. The human problem is one of sight and insight, of seeing ourselves as living the mystery of redemption in a redeemed world. Biblical religion has never been angelistic, never over-spiritualized. It has always insisted on the goodness of matter, even when matter is damaged by sin. One can look at the world and see possibilities for abusive profit, opportunities to make an abundance of wealth that leaves behind a ravaged landscape, or one can look at the world and see the possibilities of a creation permeated by grace, filled with the sustenance and nurture of not only the human race in its wealth or in its poverty, but also of the cattle, the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

Archdeacon John’s paper points to a most valuable way of seeing, that of regarding the natural world as an icon. Looking at the created world in an iconic manner is a form of contemplation. Wise insight is not just glancing briefly, but peering deeply into that which is seen. In the biblical literature, this way of seeing, an insightful, careful regard is called *binah*, or *tebunah*,

“insight,” a word that is often found parallel with *hokhmah*, “wisdom.” A careful regard of the world reveals the wisdom, the understanding and insight that created it. Through wise seeing, creation can become an icon that leads us to the knowledge of God. “Does not wisdom call, and insight give forth her voice?” (Prov. 8:1) A quick look, a careless regard, a desire for quick profit or utility, or a heedless use of natural resources can be healed by the saving wisdom found in the contemplation of what God has made. But contemplation of icons demands time and attention, it comes about through a sabbath, a resting in that which is contemplated, and through that rest that lets go of preconceptions and obligations and replaces the seeing that looks for profit with the insight of a divinely instituted sabbath that becomes an opening to God through His creation. So nature as an icon brings us back to the sabbatical rest, back to leaving the fields with unharvested grain and the trees with unpicked fruit left for the poor to glean, brings us back to the remission of debts and to the right relationship expressed in a kenotic rest that lets all find sustenance for life, the landowner and the migrant, the fruit farmer and the poor, the cattle, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, all of them figures in an icon of creation.

# **Catholic Voting: How Ecclesial Authority, Moral Principles, and Prudential Judgment Intersect**

By Melanie Susan Barrett, Ph.D., S.T.D.

*Note: This article is based on a presentation given to the Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue of Chicago on October 20, 2020.*

The formal title of my talk is, “Catholic Voting: How Ecclesial Authority, Moral Principles, and Prudential Judgment Intersect.” But the informal title of my talk is, “Don’t Kill the Messenger.” I say that as a joke, but only half-joking, because I realize that this is a heated time in our country, and Americans from all walks of life hold very strong and passionate views about the upcoming election and the respective candidates. Consequently, I’m bound to say something that someone here disagrees with, perhaps even passionately. So I look forward to lively conversation afterward, but let’s bear in mind God’s commandment—which all of us share in common— “thou shalt not murder.”

Also, my main purpose for discussing Catholic voting is not to advise anyone—either Jew or Catholic—how they ought to vote in the upcoming election. Rather, my plan is to use voting as a *case study* to illustrate how church authority, moral principles, and prudential judgment intersect for Catholics. It is my hope that this will generate fruitful dialogue, as we compare how the process (and the content) is both similar and different across our two traditions.

## **Catholic Moral Theology**

Catholics maintain that human reason can arrive naturally at the conclusion that God exists, but that it needs the further assistance of divine revelation to know who God is: for example, that God is not a being within the universe but is the very ground of being itself (Exodus 3:14: “I am Who am”); or that the essence of God is love: that God in fact is a Trinity of three persons, equal in dignity, who love one another eternally. Moreover, along with our Jewish brothers and sisters, Catholics acknowledge that God has revealed himself in the world in a variety of ways: including through creation, the law, and the prophets. Accordingly, we Catholics consider ourselves morally obliged to follow the Ten Commandments. Among them, the most important one—and the foundation of all the rest—is the first: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

As Christians, we further believe that God has revealed himself most definitively in a person: the person of Jesus, whom we understand as God’s eternal Word, a Word who became incarnate within a human nature for the sake of human salvation. Because the most definitive revelation of God in the world is not a text but a person, we Catholics look first to the person—his words and his actions, what he said and what he did—to interpret the rest of divine revelation. Thus, we read both the law and the prophets through the lens of Jesus.

Of particular importance is Jesus’ teaching (found in all three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke) that the two most important laws are these: to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18).<sup>1</sup> But what does love of neighbor entail? How do we love our neighbor? Jesus gives us many examples. I will mention just three.

First, Jesus reaffirms the commandment against adultery (Exodus 20:14, and Deuteronomy 5:18) but then extends it— “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed

adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27)—which is why we Catholics consider pornography to be immoral (its production, distribution, and use). Second, Jesus affirms the teaching of Leviticus 19:17-18 (to avoid hate in one’s heart, to reprove one’s neighbor openly, and to take no revenge and cherish no grudges against one’s own people), but then extends it: “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:43-45). Third, in Jesus’ account of the final judgment, which he depicts as God’s act of figuratively separating the sheep from the goats (undoubtedly a reference to Ezekiel 34:17-31), Jesus counts among the good sheep (whom God will reward with eternal life) those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit prisoners (Matthew 25:35-40): moral obligations which are found throughout the Hebrew scriptures as well, including Isaiah 58:7, Ezekiel 18:7, and Job 22:7.

Because Jesus did not spell out our moral obligations in every possible circumstance however, we must rely upon the broader Catholic tradition (which has developed over the past 2,000 years) to guide us. Moral questions regarding how to love our neighbor take as foundational the claim of Genesis 1:27, that all human beings, male and female, are made in the image of God—which we refer to theologically as the principle of human dignity. Because all human beings have inherent dignity (intrinsic value), this implies a wide range of moral obligations toward them. These obligations can be grouped into two types: positive prescriptions (concerning good acts, acts that we *should* do to human beings); and negative prescriptions (concerning bad acts, acts that we *should not* do to human beings).

I mentioned previously some of the positive prescriptions: to provide food, water, clothing, and health care; to welcome strangers; and to visit prisoners. Among the negative prescriptions, some of them vary depending on the circumstances. For example, God commands us not to steal (Deuteronomy 5:19 and Exodus 20:15). Jesus then reaffirms this (Matthew 19:18). We Catholics consider this command to be morally binding, generally speaking. For example, we uphold the right to private property as natural. However, we do not consider the right to private property to be absolute. It is limited by another principle, called the universal destination of goods. According to this principle (based upon Genesis 1:28-29), the created goods of the earth are intended by God for all human beings (not just for some of them).<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, in the case of “obvious and urgent necessity when the only way to provide for immediate, essential needs” such as food, shelter, and clothing is to take someone’s else’s property and use it, stealing is morally permitted.<sup>3</sup> Our *Catechism* explicitly declares in that in such a circumstance, “there is no theft.”<sup>4</sup>

Other negative prescriptions in Catholic tradition are moral absolutes; they apply to all people, in every time and place, and in every circumstance, without exception. For example, adultery: always prohibited. (No exceptions). Sex outside of marriage: always prohibited. Racism: always prohibited.<sup>5</sup> Torture: always prohibited.<sup>6</sup> Mutilation of healthy body parts, when not medically necessary, for example, by participating in a vasectomy or a trans-gender surgery: always prohibited. “Treating workers as mere means to an end”: always prohibited.<sup>7</sup> “Deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions”: always prohibited.<sup>8</sup> “Treating the poor as disposable”: always prohibited.<sup>9</sup> Redefining marriage, to mean something other than a union between one man and one woman, naturally oriented to procreation and the good of the spouses: always prohibited.<sup>10</sup> Direct killing of innocent human beings: always prohibited. Thus, we always prohibit abortion, medical experimentation on human embryos, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the targeting of non-combatants during war, and genocide.<sup>11</sup> No exceptions.

In the Catholic tradition, we describe these forbidden acts as “intrinsically evil,” to denote the fact that they are evil in every possible circumstance. They are *always* evil. For a Catholic to participate in one of these acts directly—or even to express one’s agreement with someone else who does—constitutes “formal cooperation with evil,” which is always gravely sinful. To participate in one of these acts indirectly, by providing the material to carry out the evil act—such as money, supplies, transportation, or voting—constitutes “material cooperation with evil,” and this too is sinful, perhaps even gravely so, unless one’s cooperation is sufficiently remote and can be morally justified by other serious considerations.

Both the positive and the negative moral prescriptions, taken together, spell out concretely how to love one’s neighbor. Possessing *positive sentiments* toward one’s neighbor, such as warm feelings of compassion, is objectively good. It is inherently pleasing to God. But it is *insufficient* to constitute *genuine* love for one’s neighbor. In the political and social sphere, loving one’s neighbor means *actively helping* one’s neighbor to attain all the good things necessary for his or her integral development: bodily, intellectual, social, and spiritual. This trajectory is most clearly articulated in the papal encyclicals and conciliar documents of the past 130 years, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 document on capital and labor) and continuing to the present day.<sup>12</sup>

So to love our neighbor means that we actively seek his good. We do this by creating the social conditions for him to attain all the good things he needs for his full development as a human being. All human beings have a natural right to these things, because all human beings are made in the image of God. The theological foundation for human rights is further deepened by our Christian belief that all human beings are brothers and sisters for whom the Son of God humbled himself—not only by taking on a human nature (in the Incarnation), but also by sacrificing himself in love (by suffering a painful death on a cross) for our sake.

Building on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II proclaimed six human rights in total: (1) the right to *life* (which is foundational, because it is the condition for the exercise of all the other rights); (2) “the right to live in a united *family* and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child’s personality”; (3) “the right to develop one’s intelligence and *freedom* in seeking and knowing the *truth*”; (4) “the right to share in the *work* which makes wise use of the earth’s material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one’s dependents”; (5) “the right freely to establish a *family*, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one’s sexuality”; and (6) the right to religious freedom, “understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person.”<sup>13</sup>

Among these six rights, the right to religious freedom is paramount—the most important—because it pertains directly to the human being’s spiritual good: his or her eternal destiny with God.<sup>14</sup> The right to life also is profoundly important due to its foundational nature, because if that right is taken away from us (through abortion, euthanasia, or gang violence), then the other rights no longer matter. For example, if I’m dead because someone has murdered me, then my right to work, or to marry and raise children, or to seek the truth about God all become irrelevant. (Of course, if I’m buried in a cemetery somewhere in the city of Chicago, then *voting* still might be possible).<sup>15</sup> But the right to religious freedom is even more important than the right to life, because our spiritual life takes precedence over our bodily life: a truth depicted most lucidly by the Christian martyrs, who willingly forfeit their own lives for the greater good of witnessing to the truth about God.

Although the right to life and the right to religious freedom stand out, all human rights are important because all human needs deserve to be met. Some needs are more pressing than others, to be sure, but every human life has value. No human life is more important than another. As Pope Francis has stated, “Our defense of the innocent *unborn*...needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The U.S. Catholic Bishops on Political Responsibility**

Every four years, preceding a presidential election, the USCCB (the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) publishes a document on political responsibility. The purpose of this document is to assess the current political situation in the United States, to remind Catholics of their moral obligations—not only to participate politically, but also to avoid cooperating with evil, even when it is indirect, to the maximum extent possible—and to offer their reasoned judgment on how to weigh competing moral claims when selecting candidates for elected office. The title of the current version (published last November, in 2019) is “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States.”

Before proceeding, I should clarify something about the nature of a bishops’ conference in the structure of the Catholic Church. There is no such thing as a “national church” in Catholic governance. There is the universal Church and what we call the “particular” church, usually meaning a diocese. The USCCB has very limited powers to legislate, and then it is usually around such matters as liturgy, the calendar of the saints, rules about clerical dress, and so on. The bishops’ conference is best described as an instrument of collaboration among the roughly 190 dioceses in the USA. It regularly writes documents, such as this one, and then votes on it. If a majority of bishops approve the document, then it is issued as a statement of the conference. But individual bishops are not bound by it. Neither are individual lay Catholics. Each bishop retains the authority in his own diocese to govern it as he sees fit: assuming that he doesn’t break any laws, either civil laws or canon laws (laws of the church). Teaching authority resides in the Pope and the College of Bishops (all bishops throughout the world). Canon 753 reads:

Although the bishops who are in communion with the head and members of the college, whether individually or joined together in conferences of bishops or in particular councils, do not possess infallibility in teaching, they are authentic teachers and instructors of the faith for the Christian faithful entrusted to their care; the Christian faithful are bound to adhere with religious submission of mind to the authentic magisterium of their bishops.<sup>17</sup>

The teachings of the USCCB therefore are considered “authoritative,” because the bishops hold this office of teaching; and if they take the time to consult with one another and reach a consensus, then most likely they have arrived at a reasonable judgment which all American Catholics ought to take seriously. Because we respect the teaching of the bishops in virtue of the office they hold, we ought to give their conclusions due consideration when forming our own judgments about what

to do in particular cases. But the authority of a regional conference of bishops, as important as it is, is not the *highest* level of authority in the Catholic church. That is found only in the teaching of all the bishops, worldwide, in communion with the bishop of Rome (the Pope).

Because the majority of American bishops approved the document on political responsibility, and voted in favor of it, in practice most of them refer American Catholics to it, when asked for advice on voting. But some bishops chose to issue their own individual statements, and they refer Catholics to those instead. They do this either to emphasize a moral aspect that they believe was undervalued in the current document, or to recommend an altogether different strategy (for choosing a political candidate). Both the formal statement promulgated by the USCCB (the entire conference of bishops), and subsequent statements by individual bishops, are intended to “form people’s consciences.” By presenting individual Catholics with their own well-reasoned opinions and arguments, the bishops seek to help their people form good judgments, and make good decisions, so that they can act in ways that are moral rather than immoral. This is what “conscience formation” entails.

Given that the political responsibility document was formally approved as a statement of the conference, it is useful for our purposes to examine its content. But before we do, it is important to bear in mind what a complex task the bishops have before them. One bishop whom many of you know, Bishop Robert Barron, describes the complexity this way:

Catholic social teaching clearly goes beyond the split between Republican and Democrat, between liberal and conservative, and therefore corresponds perfectly with neither political camp. Anyone who says that either of our political parties perfectly, or even adequately, represents Catholic social thought is simply misinformed. Broadly speaking, the Democratic Party advocates a number of themes and principles revered by the Catholic tradition: concern for the underprivileged, for the migrant and refugee, and for the environment, as well as opposition to capital punishment and to all forms of racism. And again, broadly speaking, the Republican Party sides with Catholic teaching in a number of ways: opposition to abortion and euthanasia, defense of the traditional family, advocacy for conscience protection and freedom of religion. Which of the two parties is more “Catholic?” It seems to me impossible to adjudicate the question in the abstract.<sup>18</sup>

So given the complexity of this task, how do the American bishops as a collective proceed? What is their methodology? Three things are noteworthy. First, in the introductory letter that precedes the document, the bishops explicitly affirm that *every* human life is *equally* sacred. No one human life is more important, or more valuable, than another.<sup>19</sup>

Second, although every human life is equally sacred, some moral issues involving human life and human flourishing naturally are more urgent than others. This is something upon which all of us can agree. For example, if my family and I typically walk to our local church or synagogue on the Sabbath to worship God, but on this morning in particular our youngest daughter is about to die from starvation, then it is not only reasonable but morally obligatory for me to postpone public worship so that I can obtain the nourishment required to save her life. My decision to miss religious services does not imply that worshipping God is not important, only that in the present moment, my daughter’s need for food is more urgent than attending religious services. Many things are good for human beings to obtain, or to experience, but some goods are needed more urgently than others.

In Catholic tradition, this common-sense view is encapsulated in a moral principle, called “the preferential option for the poor.”<sup>20</sup> According to this principle, when determining which human needs are most urgent, we should direct our focus to those human beings at the margins: the poorest, weakest, and most vulnerable members of our society. This does not imply that we don’t have special moral obligations to our family members; we do. Husbands and wives have special moral responsibilities to care for one another. Parents are responsible for their children. Children bear some responsibility toward their parents, especially when those children have grown into adulthood and their parents are now elderly or infirm. But beyond this, loving our neighbor means focusing our attention, first and foremost, on those human beings whose needs are the most urgent.

In their introductory letter, the bishops acknowledge a wide range of pressing human needs—such as comprehensive immigration reform, the wound of racism, the environmental crisis, poverty, and the death penalty—but they explicitly prioritize abortion as the most urgent threat currently facing our nation:

The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family and because of the number of lives destroyed... Our efforts to protect the unborn remain as important as ever, for just as the Supreme Court may allow greater latitude for state laws restricting abortion, state legislators have passed statutes not only keeping abortion legal through all nine months of pregnancy but opening the door to infanticide. Additionally, abortion contaminates many other important issues by being inserted into legislation regarding immigration, care for the poor, and health care reform.<sup>21</sup>

Third, the fuller rationale for this prioritization of abortion is explained later, in the body of the document, when it cites the traditional Catholic teaching concerning intrinsically evil acts, and then uses this as a framework for mapping out current moral priorities in the social/political arena. Intrinsically evil actions pertain not just to private morality but also to public morality because such acts “are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor ... [and] always opposed to the authentic good of persons” by undercutting their dignity.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, such acts “must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned.”<sup>23</sup>

Among such acts, those that involve “the intentional taking of innocent human life” constitute “preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others.”<sup>24</sup> In the bishops’ estimation, “To treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice...is a mistake with grave moral consequences,” and “a legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.”<sup>25</sup>

Because the right to life is foundational—the basis for all other human rights, because if someone is dead, if their *actual* life has been taken from them, then *quality* of life issues automatically become irrelevant—the bishops contend that countering direct threats against it should be our preeminent concern. Accordingly, the bishops prioritize not only abortion but also euthanasia (which also directly attacks innocent human life).

Among other urgent moral issues, the bishops specifically mention: human cloning and destructive research on human embryos (both of which “directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life”); genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in terrorism or war (all of



which constitute “direct assaults on innocent human life”); and “acts of racism, treating workers as mere means to an end, deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, [and] redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning” (all of which constitute “violations of human dignity”).<sup>26</sup> Because all of these acts are intrinsically evil, one cannot justifiably vote for a candidate who supports *any* of them if one’s intention “is to support that position.” Such a vote would amount to “formal cooperation with evil,” which is always immoral.<sup>27</sup>

Other serious threats to human life and dignity also merit our attention, including “environmental degradation...the use of the death penalty...the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, pornography...[threats to] religious liberty [and] an unjust immigration policy.”<sup>28</sup> These issues cannot be dismissed or ignored. Nor can we ignore the perennial “moral imperative to respond to [our neighbors’] basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, education, and meaningful work,” an obligation which “is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means.”<sup>29</sup>

Altogether, our task is to defend human life and dignity, by attending to *all* these important issues. But this does not imply that every issue is equally important. We must consciously avoid “a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed.”<sup>30</sup>

So how does all of this translate into voting? Four recommendations are central. First, because we always must avoid formal cooperation with evil, a Catholic can *never* vote for a candidate who supports an intrinsically evil act, “if the voter’s intent is to support that position.”<sup>31</sup> Second, even if that is not the voter’s intent, voting for such a candidate *still* would be problematic, because it would constitute material cooperation with evil. Why? Because such a vote would indirectly provide the “material” to help the candidate carry out the evil act. To justify such material cooperation with evil, “grave moral reasons” are required.<sup>32</sup> What counts as a grave moral reason? The bishops don’t spell this out; such calculations are left to the voter’s own prudential judgment.

Third, if *all* the candidates in an election support one or more intrinsically evil acts, then “the conscientious voter faces a dilemma.” In such a case, two options are possible. One could vote for none of the candidates, or for whichever candidate would bring about the least amount of evil overall.<sup>33</sup> *How* to calculate the lesser evil, however, is left to the voter’s prudential judgment. Fourth, assuming that the Catholic voter has taken seriously “the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts,” which “has a special claim on our consciences and actions,” then he or she also “should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that not all of the American bishops concur with this overall approach. One notable dissenting view is that of Bishop Robert McElroy, the bishop of San Diego. Although McElroy agrees that abortion is *an* urgent moral issue in the election, he disagrees that it is the *most* urgent issue overall. Climate change is equally important, in McElroy’s estimation, because although “the death toll from abortion is more immediate...the long-term death toll from unchecked climate change is larger and threatens the very future of humanity.” Moreover, the “growing culture of exclusion,” especially as it fuels animosity toward immigrants, fear of Muslims, anti-Semitism, and “racial and ethnic disparities in education, health, job availability and housing,” ought to be considered equal in importance to both abortion and climate

change. McElroy further acknowledges that for “many faith-filled Catholics...the need to repudiate radically this culture of exclusion before it spreads further and leads to new levels of moral paralysis and division” is itself “the most compelling issue that arises from Catholic social teaching for American voters.”<sup>35</sup>

Here in the Archdiocese of Chicago, shortly after McElroy presented this argument publicly, Cardinal Cupich sent a letter to his diocesan priests delineating “Norms for Political Involvement.” In it, Cupich specifically commended McElroy’s approach, designating it as an important resource for priests to consider. He also referred priests to an address of his own, presented at the USCCB’s Social Ministry Gathering, in which he asserted that promoting human dignity is our baptismal call, and explicitly cautioned against “any attempt to fragment our Catholic social teaching, [by] pretending to offer so-called non-negotiables, which ends up reducing our moral tradition to a single set of issues,” arguing instead for “an integrated and consistent approach.”<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, given this diversity of theological approaches among our bishops, and the immense latitude afforded to the individual Catholic’s prudential judgment, it is unsurprising that on the eve of this election, American Catholics as a voting bloc remain just as divided as the American electorate in general.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mt 22:35-40, Mk 12:28-34, and Lk 10:27.

<sup>2</sup> See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, par. 171-175, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html). See also Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 69; and Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* par. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2408, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P8B.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P8B.HTM); and *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See USCCB, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States,” par. 23. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, par. 22, 26, 28-30. [http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html).

<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, par. 47. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html).

<sup>14</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, par. 155. See also Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, par. 2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Kelly Bauer, “Chicago And Rigged Elections? The History Is Even Crazier Than You’ve Heard,” *DNAINFO* (October 19, 2016). <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20161019/downtown/vote-rigged-elections-history-fraud-stolen-trump/>.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, par. 101. [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exsultate.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html). Italics added for emphasis.

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<sup>17</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, Book III, Canon 753. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib3-cann747-755\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann747-755_en.html).

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Robert Barron, “Four Principles for Catholics During Election Season,” *Word on Fire* (October 6, 2020), <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/four-principles-for-catholics-during-election-season/28740/>.

<sup>19</sup> USCCB, “Introductory Letter: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” <https://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/usccb-general-assembly/upload/usccb-forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter-20191112.pdf>. Here the Bishops quote Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, par. 25.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, par. 182-184.

<sup>21</sup> USCCB, “Introductory Letter: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship.”

<sup>22</sup> USCCB, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” par. 22 and 24.

<sup>23</sup> USCCB, par. 22.

<sup>24</sup> USCCB, par. 22. (Here the Bishops cite their 1998 document, “Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, par. 5, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/living-the-gospel-of-life>).

<sup>25</sup> USCCB, par. 22.

<sup>26</sup> USCCB, par. 23.

<sup>27</sup> USCCB, par. 34.

<sup>28</sup> USCCB, par. 29.

<sup>29</sup> USCCB, par. 25.

<sup>30</sup> USCCB, par. 28.

<sup>31</sup> USCCB, par. 34.

<sup>32</sup> USCCB, par. 34.

<sup>33</sup> USCCB, par. 36.

<sup>34</sup> USCCB, par. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Bishop Robert W. McElroy, “Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting,” address given to Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture, University of San Diego (February 6, 2020), <http://www.sdcatholic.org/bishops/bishop-mcelroy/conscience-candidates-and-discipleship-in-voting/>. For Bishop McElroy’s more recent comments on voting in the 2020 presidential election, see Christopher White, “Bishop Laments Questioning of Biden’s Faith Due to Abortion Policies,” *National Catholic Reporter* (October 13, 2020), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/bishop-laments-questioning-bidens-faith-due-abortion-policies>.

<sup>36</sup> Cardinal Blase Cupich, “Cardinal Cupich: Promoting Human Dignity is Our Baptismal Call,” *National Catholic Reporter* (January 25, 2020), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/cardinal-cupich-promoting-human-dignity-our-baptismal-call>.

## Authors Page

### John Chryssavgis

The Reverend Archdeacon John Chryssavgis is archdeacon of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. He currently serves as theological advisor to the Ecumenical Patriarch on environmental issues, and theologian for the Office of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. His previous appointments were as professor of Patristics at Balamand University in Lebanon, Professor of Theology at Holy Cross School of Theology and director of the Religious Studies Program at Hellenic College, Lecturer in the Divinity School and the School of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney, co-founder of St. Andrew's Theological College in Sydney, where he was Sub-Dean and taught Patristics and Church History. Prior to these academic appointments, Dr. Chryssavgis was personal assistant to the Greek Orthodox Primate in Australia.

The author of several books and numerous articles in several languages on the Church Fathers and Orthodox Spirituality, Dr. Chryssavgis' most recent publications include *Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Holy Cross Press, 2000), *In the Footsteps of Christ: Abba Isaiah of Scetis* (SLG Press Oxford, 2001), *The Body of Christ: A Place of Welcome for People with Disabilities* (Light and Life, 2002), *Letters from the Desert: A Selection from Barsanuphius and John* (St. Vladimir's Press, 2003), *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of The Green Patriarch* (Eerdmans, 2003), *Light Through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (Orbis Books, 2004), *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Ashgate, 2004), *The Ecumenical Patriarchate: A Brief Guide* (Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2005), *The Reflections of Abba Zosimas* (SLG Press Oxford, 2006), and *Beyond the Shattered Image: Insights into an Orthodox Christian Ecological Worldview* (Light and Life, 2nd ed. 2007). Two volumes with the full correspondence of Barsanuphius and John appeared in 2006-2007 in the Fathers of the Church series of Catholic University Press.

Born in Australia (1958), he matriculated from the Scots College (1975). He received his degree in Theology from the University of Athens (1980), a diploma in Byzantine Music from the Greek Conservatory of Music (1979) and was awarded a research scholarship to St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary (1982). He completed his doctoral studies in Patristics at the University of Oxford (1983). When he is not on an airplane flying between the United States and Constantinople, he lives in Bath, Maine.

### Ronald Kunkel

The Reverend Ronald Kunkel is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and associate professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake. He teaches in the area of sacramental/liturgical theology, theological anthropology, the theology of grace and eschatology. In addition to teaching at Mundelein Seminary, Fr. Kunkel has taught in the Institute for Diaconal Studies. He is the author of "Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation" in *Lift Up Your Hearts: A Pastoral, Theological, and Historical Survey of the Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal*. His articles and essays have appeared in *Chicago Studies*.

Prior to joining the faculty at Mundelein, Fr. Kunkel served as Associate Pastor at St. Peter, Skokie; and as Associate Pastor and Director of Liturgy at Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago. He was a Founding Board Member and Spiritual Director, Illinois Catholic Prayer Breakfast. Since joining the faculty, he has also served as an adjunct faculty member at the Institute for Priestly Formation, Creighton University.

Fr. Kunkel did his undergraduate studies at the University of Notre Dame where he earned the B.B.A. His seminary studies were at the Pontifical North American College and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. His post graduate studies include an S.T.L. from the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm, Rome; and an S.T.D. from the University of St. Mary of the Lake. He is a member of the Society for Catholic Liturgy and The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars.

### **Robert L. Schoenstene**

The Reverend Robert L. Schoenstene has an M.A. and an S.S.L. He is a priest of the Diocese of Joliet and professor emeritus in the Departments of Biblical Studies, Homiletics, and Pre-Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake. He teaches in the area of Old Testament and ancient languages. He has focused on the Pentateuch and the prophets. Additionally, he actively follows questions of religious and science. He is the author of *Reading Church Latin: Techniques and Commentary for Comprehension (Hillenbrand Books)*. His articles have appeared in *Chicago Studies*. Prior to joining the faculty at USML he served in several capacities at the Pontifical College, Josephinum including, Spiritual Director, Dean of Men, and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies. His memberships in the academy include the Catholic Biblical Association and the American Society of Papyrologists. Fr. Schoenstene did seminary and graduate studies in theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum, Semitic studies at the University of Wisconsin and post-graduate studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome.

### **Melanie Susan Barrett**

Dr. Melanie Susan Barrett is Professor of Moral Theology at Mundelein Seminary of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake. Dr. Barrett teaches courses on sexuality and vocation, the social doctrine of the Church, fundamental moral theology, philosophical ethics, and key figures in medieval and Reformation theology. She writes on virtue ethics and studies the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Aquinas.

Her first book, *Love's Beauty at the Heart of the Christian Moral Life* develops the ethical theory implicit in the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a prominent 20th century Swiss Catholic theologian, attempting to retrieve the concept of beauty for Christian theology and yielding important ethical insights, culminating in an aesthetic and dramatic theory of ethics: one in which the perception of the beauty of God's love in Christ becomes a foundational experience for moral formation and ongoing ethical discernment. She is currently working on a monograph on suffering and the moral life in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. She has published book chapters and articles on various topics, including foundational moral principles, the role of prudence in evangelization, the need for God in ethics, seminary formation, the writings of Pope Francis, natural family planning, Jewish natural law, and religious freedom.

Dr. Barrett did her undergraduate education at Northwestern University; and graduate studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where she received the M.A. and Ph.D. (Religious

Ethics). She received a licentiate (S.T.L.) degree concentrated in theological anthropology from the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, as well as a second research doctorate, the S.T.D. (Moral Theology) from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.