

AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
ECOLOGY AND
THEOLOGY OF CREATION

by

Rev. Terence Baz, Syracuse, NY

A DOCTORAL PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
March 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION TWO: A THEOLOGY OF CREATION	7
Further Theological Developments	14
An Orthodox Approach to the Scriptures	17
Some Orthodox Parameters	26
Necessary Ecological Links for Orthodoxy	33
Conclusion	58
SECTION THREE: THE PROJECT	60
Applying Thomas Groome’s Educational Method of <i>Shared Praxis in Praxis</i>	61
The Sessions	61
SECTION FOUR: REPORTS & EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	81
Questionnaire on Discussion Sessions	114
Summary of Responses to Questionnaire	118
WORKS SITED	125

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Call To Sanctify The World

I have decided to focus my Doctor of Ministry project on the area of ecology. My reason is that for the Orthodox Church, the much-discussed issues of ecology and a theology of Creation have always been seen as central themes in salvation history.

Definition of Ecology

From the beginning, it is worth asking the question: What is ecology? A dictionary of biology defines ecology as the "study of the relations of animals and plants, particularly of animal and plant communities, to their surroundings, animate and inanimate."¹ The *Webster's Dictionary* expands this biological relationship to human sociological groups and culture as well.² A Christian definition will include the question of humanity's responsibility toward the created world.³ Orthodoxy talks of the need for a "cosmic transfiguration."⁴

The aim of this paper is to outline the theological basis for this issue and then describe a doctoral project that applies to it. The theological outline will make two fundamental claims. The first is that, without denying the need for categorization and analysis of the issue, this ecological question must be re-thought in terms of a synthesis of both the spiritual and material aspects. It is my belief that without this, no study is complete. The second claim comes from this premise: that the fundamental call for humanity is to sanctify the world by combining the two aspects in our day-to-day lives.

¹ M. Abercrombie, C. J. Hickman and M. L. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Biology* (Penguin Books, Fifth Edit., Baltimore, Md., USA, 1966), p. 85.

² N. Webster, *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, Second Edit., J. L. McKechnie editor, (Dorset & Baber, 1983), p. 574.

³ See F. Van Dyke, D. C. Mahan, J. K. Sheldon, R. H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996), p. 26.

⁴ J. Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Light & Life Publishing, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1999), p.

It is my hope that this paper will bear this out. Before proceeding, however, I believe that some personal reflections will be worth adding.

A Personal Reflection

Although I have studied theology throughout my academic life, I have also maintained an interest in science. This has led me to be fascinated with some major cosmological questions that astro physicists are currently asking. Many scientific journals and magazines are also rightly very concerned about the impact humanity is having on the environment. However, one cannot but question what seem to be some confused philosophical assumptions (such as pantheism) underlying how they see the environment and creation. In contrast, I have become convinced that the Orthodox Christian Church has insights into these questions on creation, which encompass and go beyond the physical realm of science. The Church believes that we play a central role in Creation and that the Genesis story of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve define our relationship to God and the rest of the cosmos. Thus, our role is vital in the question of the ecological balance of the cosmos. Further, while the question of ecology fully embraces the above scientific questions, it also constantly confronts us right down to the minutest aspect at the local level. As well as this, Orthodoxy sees our role in relation to God and the cosmos as not just being one of a number of self-contained aspects of its living faith or Tradition.⁵ Rather, every aspect of its living faith is connected to all the other aspects since each brings us into the mystery of God. To develop an understanding of the role, which an Orthodox Christian must play in responding to this issue, will be a major goal of the doctoral project. It is hoped that those in this parish who do the project will not only tackle environmental issues where possible but more importantly they will

⁵ This word is used with a capital because it is a defined term and not just regarded as an accumulation of pious and useful past practices. In Orthodoxy, Tradition embraces its whole ecclesial life. This includes the Scriptures and even though it is regarded as paramount in the Church's spiritual life, it is still only part of it. The rest of the Tradition includes its liturgical life, doctrines, ascetic practices, canon law and devotions.

also have profoundly deepened their relationship with God and His cosmos because, as far as Orthodoxy is concerned, recognizing our role as mediator between the two spheres is precisely what God wants us to do.

My Parish Setting

Our parish is St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church in Syracuse, New York. It has about 130 families. The current premise was consecrated on July 20, 1969, on the feast of the prophet Elijah (or Elias) in the Orthodox Christian liturgical calendar and by chance, the day of the first landing on the moon. The coincidence of linking the fiery chariot of Elijah with the fiery rockets to the moon has not gone unnoticed. The church building is on one level with the vestibule in the center, the worship building on the right (so that the altar faces the east) and the hall and kitchen on the left. Behind the vestibule is a conference room and at the back part of the building are the office rooms and religious education classrooms. The church property is eleven acres. The parishioners overall are deeply committed and love their parish. Most of them are prepared to work hard. The church buildings and grounds are well maintained and the Parish Council is trying to improve the building to minimize energy costs. Several initiatives to help this were taken last year.

The parish community is largely Americanized but many were born in Palestine before 1948 and about 90 percent of the parish has its origins from there. They are acutely conscious of the current Middle Eastern impasse and many keep themselves abreast of developments. The pain they feel from this does cause them to focus on their need to maintain their parish identity. Thus, they are willing to work hard for the Church.

The very committed members of the parish have a strong pragmatic notion of doing what is needed for it to survive. They seem to have been taught little however of the theological background of their Church. This is true for the issue of ecology, which is theologically central to Orthodoxy. I have little doubt that most future decisions in the

church will be ecologically sound but coupled with a heightened sense of its importance, I hope the project will give them a renewed sense of purpose about their faith through an understanding of their role in creation.

A Word on Method

The method to be employed for this dissertation will be to firstly describe the theoretical foundation for this project. Thus, we will examine the issue from a biblical point of view and then outline certain hermeneutic principles required by Orthodoxy to guarantee a proper theological interpretation and application of the scriptures for today. After this, some Orthodox Christian theological principles will be outlined to show how this issue connects to both the material and spiritual worlds. Then certain underlying but often unnoticed philosophical factors that can have a significant impact on our ability to respond to the issue adequately will be examined. To conclude, we will see how bringing in the liturgical prayers and the Eucharist is vital for any proper response to the issue.

Secondly, in outlining the project for the parish, I will use the Christian Religious Education method given by Thomas Groome, in his book, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*.⁶ The Doctoral Project should bear out the usefulness of this method for this complex issue. In using this method, the theological material will be broken into nine topics that will be discussed and reflected on by the Local Committee of the parish. It is my hope that this will result in a deepened understanding of their Orthodox Christian faith together with a renewed commitment to treat God's creation in the way he intended for us.

Finally, an assessment must be done to evaluate how successful the project was. It is hoped that the project will serve as a model for any other clergy interested in this

⁶T. H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA), 1980.

issue.

SECTION TWO: A THEOLOGY OF CREATION

A Biblical Theology of Creation

I will now outline a biblical theology of creation starting with the Old and New Testaments. I will then look at the Holy Spirit's relationship to creation and finally cover some of the developments that followed from the scriptures in the early Church.

Creation in the Old Testament

From the book of Genesis itself, creation is tied to salvation history and the word of God.⁷ It was enacted by a divine command and is good.⁸ Thus, creation is fundamentally optimistic.⁹ The remoteness of chaos (Gen. 1:2) is contrasted with Adam's intimacy (Gen. 1: 26-28) with God and his spiritual and bodily aspects are created in God's likeness.¹⁰ Sexuality is also blessed by God (Gen. 1:28).¹¹ The seventh day of rest (Gen. 2:2-4a) shows God's affection for the created world since he blesses this day.¹² In Genesis 9: 8-15, God establishes his Covenant with creation as well as Noah. God promises to protect all of Noah's descendants as well as "every living creature on earth" and uses the symbol of the rainbow as a sign of the covenant.¹³

In salvation history, the history of the Hebrew people is a continuing act of God's creation (Is. 43:14-21; Jer. 1:5; Ez. 32:3ff.; Ps. 74:12ff; 77:4; 106:9f.).¹⁴ The prophets also connect the truth of creation with the present, which means that it has ethical

7. L. Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence*, trans. by R. Strachan, (Burns & Oates, London, 1970), p. 5.

8. Op. cit., p. 7.

9. Op. cit., p. 9.

10. Op. cit., p. 10.

11. Ibid.

12. Op. cit., p. 11.

13. cf. F. Van Dyke, D. C. Mahan, J. D. Sheldon, R. H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1996), pp. 72f.

14. L. Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence*, op. cit., p. 12.

implications. Amos (5:8f; 9:6f.) and Isaiah (5:12; 48:12f.) say that the people have obligations to creation and Malachi (2:10ff.) says that the covenant is connected to the divine creator.¹⁵ Significantly, they also connect the Last Days with creation. Amos (4:2-13; also: 7:4; Jer. 4:23; Joel 3:1ff.; Zeph. 1:15; Mal. 3:2) says that God is the Eschatological Judge and Isaiah (27:1ff.) says that the creator combats the powers of chaos and will be fulfilled in the new creation.¹⁶

The poetry and piety of the Hebrew people express the wonder and awe of God's creation. Thus, the creator combats hostile powers (Ps. 104:7) with mighty blows (Ps. 74:13) and banishes them (Is. 51:9f.; Ps. 89:10; 74:10). It is this world's powers that are hostile to God (Job 40:10ff and Ps. 104:26).¹⁷ In contrast to the hostile powers in the world, there is an ever-present theme of praise and wonder at the order and beauty of creation (cf. Ps. 8; 10; 29; 89; & 104) and these are seen as the direct work of God.¹⁸ This theme of praise is present in their worship, such as in the Enthronement Psalms (95: 3-6; 96: 4-10; 100: 3; also Ps. 66:5; 96:4ff.; 104; 115; 119; 136: 5f.; 145 - 8). Thus, creation is contemporary and is continuing through God's governance and conservation of the world.¹⁹

In the Wisdom books, there is an attempt to rationally interpret the mystery of creation. Thus, the truth of creation is studied for its own sake in order to admire its perfection (Job. 37:14; Job. 5:9ff.; 9:8ff. 26:7; 28:12ff. Ps. 104:24; 139:14). Here, the approach is rational and more akin to cosmological speculation than to an interpretation in terms of saving history, but with a religious angle: live in accordance with wisdom and emulate it (Prov. 2:5-8; 35; Job. 28:28; Eccles. 16:24; Wis. 6:1-21).²⁰ The Greek rationalistic influence made it more personal than communal in its emphasis. Also,

15. Op. cit., p. 13.

16. Ibid.

17. Op. cit., p. 14.

18. Op. cit., p. 15.

19. Op. cit., pp. 15-16.

20. Op. cit., p. 16.

Wisdom is seen as a co-principle of creation and will influence the New Testament thought on the Logos.²¹

Creation in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the phrase, "since the foundation of the world" (Mt. 13:35; 25:24; Mk. 13:19; Lk. 11:50; also Mt. 19:8; 24:21; Mk. 10:6; 13:19) is common and emphasizes how creation affects its creatures now. God's paternal care (Mt. 5:45) is currently manifested but also imposes obligations on us.²² Thus, the present world is "God's domain, the sphere of His efficacious works in saving history"²³ and this means that the "present is still swayed by original order of creation."²⁴ Thus, Luke uses his genealogy to show that the whole human race is under God's dominion, and Matthew (19:4-6 and 8; cf. Mk. 10:6-12) uses this principle to argue about divorce. Thus, Christ is the "messianic author of the new world"²⁵ and a new messianic order is being ushered in where the least in the kingdom (including creation) is even greater than the prophets (Mt. 11:11-12). Likewise, the early New Testament community prays to the creator of "heaven and earth" for intercession (Acts 4:24).²⁶

St. Paul preaches about creation at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17; 17:23ff.) and links the Old Testament thought about creation to the present. Thus, "all things are from God" (1 Cor. 11:12) and "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." (1 Cor. 10:26, quoting Ps. 24:1). The light of creation also enkindles the light of knowledge in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). In stating that nothing is unclean (1 Cor. 10:25 & 30; Rom. 14:14 & 20), he bases this on the truth of creation, which has a bearing on what are our duties (Rom. 1:19f.).²⁷

21. Op. cit., p. 17.

22. Op. cit., p. 23.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Op. cit., p. 24.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

In 1 Cor. 8:6, St. Paul says that the Son shares in the Father's work of Creation but without any differentiation of their respective roles in saving history. Thus, Christ's role in creation, as with salvation, is that of Lord and mediator.²⁸ He is the one mediator and was pre-existent before the world began.²⁹ His role is cosmic (Eph. 1:4 and 10) and this is made clearer in his hymn to creation (Col. 1:12-18a). Christ's saving role and its implication for today is taken a step further here than it is in the book of Wisdom because the Wisdom of Creation is now viewed as the person of the Son of God who actively participates in creation since all things were created "through him."³⁰ He is also the goal of creation and is the power, which still preserves and sustains the being of every creature (cf. Rom. 11: 36).³¹

Thus, for St. Paul, creation and salvation are one in Christ.³² Christ is a new Adam (Rom. 5:12-31; 1 Cor. 15:45); a new creation (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:4) and a new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10), and this was planned since the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and realized in the fullness of time (Eph. 1:10; Gal. 4:4) as a mystery hidden for ages in God (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10). Thus, the second creation culminates salvation history and restores creation to a higher plain. Thus, not only is Creation good (1 Cor. 7:31; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:14; 1 Pet. 2:11; cf. also 1 Jn. 2:17) but something in which we can faithfully partake (1 Cor. 10:26; 1 Tim. 4:4; cf. Tit. 1:15; Rom. 14:14 & 20; 1 Cor. 3:21f.) through our life in Christ (Jn. 5:26; 6:48; 14:6; 1 Jn. 1:2; 1 Jn. 5:11).³³

Eschatologically, the resurrection released the energies "which bring the second Creation to its final transfiguration, that glory for which in our eager longing we now groan in travail (Rom. 8: 20-23). The final glorification will produce the new heavens

28. Op. cit., p. 25.

29. Op. cit., p. 26.

30. Op. cit., p. 27.

31. Ibid. Note the typological images that follow.

32. Op. cit., p. 32.

33. Op. cit., p. 33.

and the new earth (Apoc. 21:18; 2 Pet 3:13).³⁴ Creation will be perfected by the power of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-28) who will vanquish all enemies, establish his messianic kingdom and subject himself to the Father. For creation, everything that is against Christ will be banished. Matter will not be annihilated but transformed (Rom. 8:23) and thus, the old world is like a seed that must be sown (1 Cor. 15:36) because it is the God given germ of the final eon (1 Cor. 15:42ff.).³⁵

The Pauline theme of the cosmic mediation of Christ is continued in the Epistle to the Hebrews.³⁶ Here, Christ "reflects the glory of God" (Heb. 1:13) because of the cosmic role He plays in creation as its upholder and sustainer. Thus, Christ is the creator of the world (Heb. 1:10). The letter to the Hebrews also takes up the Old Testament tradition that the world was created in the Word and is sustained and preserved by it. (Ps. 119:91f.; Eccles. 43:26; Wis. 16:24ff.).³⁷ St. John takes it a step further by fusing creation through Christ with creation through the Logos. "Here the history of redemption by the incarnate Word is linked with the origins of the world, as is obvious simply from the fact that the prologue opens with the first words of Genesis."³⁸ John develops the Old Testament notions of a personified Word of God (Ps. 33:4ff.; 107:20) and the hypostatized wisdom (Prov. 8:22-31; Wis. 7:22ff; 8:3; 9:9ff.) into that of "the pre-existent Christ and the Son of God who functions as the personal principle of creation which impregnates the world and the course of its history (Jn. 1:3)"³⁹ and is our light and life. Both 1 Jn. 1:1 and Apoc. 19:13 use it in the same sense and Christ is the "beginning and the end," the "first

34. Ibid. cf. also Is. 65:17 & Is. 66:22. Although Scheffczyk does not define the word "energies" he seems to connect this idea with the power of Christ.

35. Op. cit., p. 34. Note that in 1 Cor. 15: 42-44, St. Paul talks in terms of the effects of this transformation and Scheffczyk applies these effects to matter.

36. Op. cit., p. 28.

37. Op. cit., p. 29. Orthodox iconography makes this a central theme in depicting the sacred space of the new ecclesial order of creation in its church buildings. Thus, the icon of Christ the Creator is placed in the central dome of the church building.

38. Ibid.

39. Op. cit., p. 30.

and the last," the "Alpha and the Omega" (Apoc. 1:17; 22:13).⁴⁰

Thus, creation is identified with salvation and redemption. So, just as Christ was the mediator in the incarnation and resurrection, the same applies to creation: Christ as its mediator made creation a saving event. Thus, Paul could talk about the pre-existent election of Christians in 2 Thess. 2:13; Eph. 1:4; 3:9; Col. 1:26 (as well as Jn. 17:24; Apoc. 17:8 and 1 Pet 1:20) because creation was divinely decreed as part of salvation.⁴¹ Thus, the New Testament continues its older counterpart's optimism about creation. At the same time, creation is not separated as a dualistic aboriginal principle (Rom. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:13; Apoc. 4:11; Eph. 3:9)⁴² but, as in the Hebraic sense, as "an historical antagonism, which always leaves the adversary subject to the Creator's divine plan (Apoc. 2:10; 13:5ff.)."⁴³

The New Testament theology of creation continues the Old Testament tradition of using it as its moral basis but now, it is "in Christ." Thus, the cosmic role of Christ (Col. 1:16ff.) has an urgent moral implication (Col. 3:9ff.) because our new nature is in the likeness of God (Eph. 4:24ff; cf. Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16; Gal. 5:6 & 25; Eph. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:2) through the resurrection.⁴⁴ But it also has a sacramental role. We receive new life in baptism, which is an act of creation (Rom. 6:1ff; 2 Cor. 4:6; Tit. 3:5) because we

40. Ibid. These words are often written around the icon of Christ the Creator in the dome of an Orthodox church.

41. Ibid. This context is very different from the elitist interpretation of some faiths such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

42. Op. cit., p. 31. The Roman Catholic Church, to avoid pantheism, has lent towards the argument of a dualistic principle to explain creation from nothing, by denying that there is any relationship between God and what he creates. Thus, the separation between the supernatural and the natural. This distinction has had a profound influence on the West's mentality in regard to the environment because it is presumed from it that only humanity's personal salvation is important. Creation, or "nature", as it is often called will look after itself. In contrast, St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the "nothing" is the absence all matter, space, time etc. In other words, it is God, who is "no-thing" and beyond these "things". This has been the Orthodox position since. cf. P. Sherrard, *Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline), MA, 1998, pp. 232-244. As he says, "there is a relationship of interdependence, interpenetration and reciprocity between God, man and creation; and it is the loss by the Christian consciousness of awareness of the full significance of this relationship that is a basic cause of today's ecological crisis." p. 243.

43. L. Scheffczyk, op. cit., p.31.

44. Op. cit., p. 34.

are regenerated (also Mt. 19:28; Jn. 3:5) or reborn (1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:23).⁴⁵ Likewise, in the Eucharist, we share in the life of Christ by partaking of the bread of life (Jn. 6:48; 1 Cor. 11:27ff.), which endures to eternal life (Jn. 6:27) and so, perfects creation.⁴⁶

Creation and the Holy Spirit

Often the role of the Holy Spirit in creation is over looked, so it is worth giving a summary. From the beginning, "God's spirit hovered over the water." (Gen. 1:2). It is "the principle of life and of vital activity."⁴⁷ The spirit of life is the breath of God (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; 7:15, 22; Sir. 38:23; Wis. 15:11, 16; 16:14).⁴⁸ Thus, "You will send forth your breath, they [animals] are created and you renew the face of the earth." (Ps. 104:30). The spirit is "able to call forth with equal appropriateness the cosmic image of the divine breath whose rhythm rules the change of the seasons, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit vivifying hearts."⁴⁹ The spirit "as a principle of life is almost always considered as a foreign element to man, given by God and taken back by Him."⁵⁰ So, when He sends it forth they are created, and thus, He renews the face of the earth (Ps. 104: 29-30; cf. Job 34:14; Judith 16:14).⁵¹ The dry scattered bones of the vision of Ezekiel need only the life giving spirit to assemble them and rise (Ezk. 37:5ff).⁵² The "great symbols of the Spirit (water, fire, air and wind) pertain to the world of nature and do not carry with them distinct features."⁵³ Thus, the Spirit of God is seen as a divine force transforming human personalities.⁵⁴

45. Op. cit., p. 35.

46. Op. cit., p. 36.

47. J. L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, London, 1975), p. 840.

48. Ibid.

49. J. Gillet, *Spirit of God*, in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology X*. Leon-Dufour, edit., P. J. Cahill, .J., transl. (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1969), p. 500.

50. J. L. McKenzie, op. cit. p. 840.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. J. Gillet, op. cit. p. 500.

54. Ibid.

The theme of the Spirit of God as a life creating force continues in the New Testament and, although rarely specified, the innumerable accounts of the manifestations of the Spirit (Jn. 19:13, 22) are obviously assumed to be an indication of God's continuing creative activity. St. Paul (Rom. 8:22-23) does specifically link creation with the "first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) and creation is linked to Salvation. Thus, creation is regarded as being central to Salvation History.

Further Theological Developments

The Development of Creation by the Early Church Fathers

Although the thrust of a theology on creation comes from Biblical thought, there were some later developments that are worth noting. The early creeds of the West⁵⁵ tend to attribute creation solely to the Father but in the East, creedal statements retain that creation is through Christ.⁵⁶ The corresponding terms of *omnipotens* (the Almighty) and *pantocrater* (the creator of all) were used in these formulas⁵⁷ and they inferred the notion of the conservation of the world.⁵⁸ These creeds also maintained a link with Salvation

55. The terms "East" and "West" are intended to be used in the context of Christendom. Historically, a geographical distinction was made between the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire. Linguistically and liturgically, a distinction was made between the Greek Byzantine and Latin Holy Roman Empires. After the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople in 1054, one could distinguish between the Roman or Latin Church and the Byzantine Church of Constantinople. Even with these distinctions, the definitions are still broad. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, when I refer to the East, I am using it in terms of the canons and theology of the Churches in communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, unless otherwise stated. For the West, I am referring to the official doctrine and theology of the Roman Catholic Church, as expressed by its Magisterium. I will specifically state it if I intend a reference to any of the Chalcedonian or Protestant Churches.

56. L. Scheffczyk, op. cit., p.41. As the notion of the three persons of the Trinity developed in the early Church, there was a tendency to specify separate functions to them. A significant factor causing the early Church to attribute creation to the Father was the pagan accusation that the Christians were atheist. St. Justin countered this by attributing creation to "the immutable and eternal God, the Creator of the world". Scheffczyk is here quoting A. Hahn and A. v. Harnack in *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche* (3rd ed. 1897). For anyone seeking more detail on this point, I recommend reading the whole section titled, *Scriptural Belief in Creation Takes Shape in the Early Creeds and Professions of Faith*, with its extensive bibliography, from pages 37 to 46.

57. Op. cit., p. 43.

58. Op. cit., p. 46.

History with emphasis on the personal activity of the divine creator.⁵⁹

For the apologists at that time, "it became necessary to present Christian belief in Creation in terms of Greek cosmology."⁶⁰ Thus, they solve the question of the transcendence of God by describing it as the mediation of the Logos. Here, they take the biblical idea but use the terminology of the Greek philosopher Philo to describe a doctrine of creation.⁶¹ This method became standard in future theological development for the Church Fathers.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons made a significant contribution to the theology of creation.⁶² In opposing Gnosticism, he used logical arguments to uphold the absolute sovereignty of God in creation. He said that if God is impotent against matter, then matter must be divine, which makes no sense. Thus, matter is not eternal and God must have created it from nothing. This is so, because God does not depend on the material world to do his works but instead creates it. Thus, His sovereignty rules out any notion of a lesser eon being the instrument of creation and it also implies that the immediacy of God's creative power is not limited.⁶³ At the same time, creation was not subject to the fall but is a blessing from God and so, the created world is good.⁶⁴ Humanity and the world were created for the sake of Christ the savior. Thus, Adam is connected to Christ. In the Eucharist, where the earthly gifts become food for the soul, creation is continued.⁶⁵ The Son is the mediator and restorer of creation through His sacrifice on the cross.⁶⁶

In the West, the practical Latin mind concentrated so largely on personal redemption that the link with creation faded into oblivion.⁶⁷ In contrast, for St.

59. Op. cit., p. 45.

60. Op. cit., p. 55.

61. Op. cit., p. 56.

62. Op. cit., p. 69.

63. As mentioned in footnote #41, P. Sherrard says the Orthodox understanding of 'creation from nothing' is just what it says, which is consistent with St. Irenaeus' understanding of creation.

64. L. Scheffczyk, op. cit., p.70.

65. Op. cit., p. 72.

66. Op. cit., p. 73f.

67. Op. cit., p. 84. Scheffczyk notes that Tertullian's juridical approach gradually became dominant.

Athanatius, (297-373 AD) creation and redemption are closely linked.⁶⁸ The same holds for St. Gregory Nazianzus, where Christ is the redeemer and Lord of the universe and thus, creation is linked to the economy of salvation.⁶⁹ For St. Gregory of Nyssa, "...the Logos is recognized as the author of Creation and redemption and the link between the two. But the Logos is brought into the cosmic plan because the fall of man is foreseen, so that redemption is not, as in Iraneaus, what was primordially intended."⁷⁰

The Holy Spirit and Creation for the Church Fathers

The early Church Fathers also continue the theme of the Holy Spirit in creation. For instance, Origen (185-254 AD) says we have dominion over creation "by the will of the spirit."⁷¹ St. Athanatius says that the Holy Spirit "hovers over all things with a creative and formative power"⁷² and that the "Spirit of the Lord fills the universe."⁷³ St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD) says that the Holy Spirit "is the supremely Great Power, divine and unsearchable, living and rational, and it belongs to Him to sanctify all things that were made by God through Christ."⁷⁴ St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397 AD) says, "Who can doubt that the Holy Spirit gives life to all things?"⁷⁵ and "who can deny that the creation of the earth is the work of the Holy Spirit?"⁷⁶ In the same passage, he quotes the Old Testament in the same way as described above.⁷⁷

Another theme, developed in Eastern Christianity was that the energy of God

This developed with Stoicism, which together with Rome's wish to objectify religion, set up static (rather than speculative) systems of thought. Thus, this juridical approach concerned itself with redemption instead of creation.

68. Op. cit., p. 86.

69. Op. cit., p. 87.

70. Op. cit., p. 87 f.

71. Origen, *Commentary on Genesis, Homily 1:16*, taken from *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity*, F. W. Krueger, edit., fourth edition, (Santa Rosa, CA, 2002), p. 49.

72. St. Athanatius, *De Genesi ad Litteram IV, 16*, in F. W. Krueger, op. cit. p. 67.

73. St. Athanatius, *Letter to Serapion on the Holy Spirit, 1:26*, in F. W. Krueger, op. cit. p. 68.

74. F. W. Krueger, op. cit., p.79.

75. St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit, Book 1, 5, 36*, in F. W. Krueger, op. cit., p.114.

76. Ibid.

77. See p.9 of this paper.

sustains creation. Thus, St. John Damascene (675-749 AD) says, "Life itself ... is energy, yea, the primal energy of the living creature."⁷⁸ and in the same passage he links the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to this energy. St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359 AD) distinguishes between the essence of God and God's sustaining energy. Thus, he says, "all things participate in God's sustaining energy, but not in His essence."⁷⁹ This has become an important theme in Orthodox theology. He also says that we understand nature through the Holy Spirit: "When the mind, by the grace of Christ, ascends to what is above nature, then it is enlightened by the illumination of the Holy Spirit" where it "clearly and purely beholds the nature of all things in accordance with its condition and order."⁸⁰

An Orthodox Approach to the Scriptures

Having laid out a Biblical Theology of creation, it is now important to outline certain hermeneutic principles that Orthodoxy believes are necessary for proper biblical interpretation and application for today. It believes that without them, it is easy to misread what God wants us to do to respond correctly to the issue that confronts us.

Scripture and Tradition

The Orthodox Christian Church has specific requirements regarding the theological interpretation of Scripture.⁸¹ In the first place, it regards the Scriptures as

78. F. W. Krueger, *op. cit.*, p.188.

79. *Op. cit.*, p.255.

80. *Ibid.*

81. I am not claiming from this that other Christian approaches to the Scriptures are not valuable. Nor would I claim that the Holy Spirit must be confined to a specific method to be able to inspire people. What I have found in the question of ecology, when interacting with the National Council of Churches, is that Orthodox theology, together with its scriptural hermeneutic, have been very influential on Protestant Churches. I also suspect that many non-Orthodox can identify with much of what it says, even if each denomination's emphasis is different.

being part of the broader life of the church, which is its Tradition.⁸² This includes the Scriptures and while it is regarded as paramount in the Church's spiritual life, it is still only part of it.⁸³

This context is central to the method that Orthodoxy uses to interpret the scriptures. Thus, the Holy Spirit did not cease to inspire people after the canonical scriptures were written. At the same time, the church believes that the prime vehicles for defining what is inspired are the Ecumenical councils of the church. Coupled with this, the prayers and liturgical life of the church are seen as the main expression of that inspiration. Thus, the long-standing debate among the Western Churches⁸⁴ over scripture versus tradition as well as the conflict over individual inspiration and ecclesiastical authority have never been issues within the Orthodox Church. There have certainly been disagreements within the Orthodox Church but it has always been recognized that the ecumenical councils defined the interpretation of, and its liturgical life gave expression to, this inspiration. In other words, the interpretation of scripture cannot go beyond these boundaries.⁸⁵ What has been defined by the Church as authentic Tradition is given a unique authority and what is subsequent to it must accept that further interpretation of the life of the church must conform to it.

Regarding science and philosophy, the Orthodox Church has always recognized the value of what the secular world might offer in terms of clarifying and giving insights to the profound mysteries which humanity encounters. Likewise, Tradition is not just seen as a static set of precepts that must be preserved in and of themselves. It is God who

82. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin Books, London, 1993), p.197. For a definition, see footnote on page 4.

83. *Op cit.*, p. 196.

84. That is, between Rome and the Protestant Churches.

85. *Ibid.*

is constant, not the Tradition that must at times find new forms of expression.⁸⁶ Thus, it has at times used secular language to express these mysteries. The most notable example is the usage of the word, *homousios*, to define the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. However, it has only ever regarded such secular research as a means to help understand these mysteries and not as ends in themselves.

The Orthodox Biblical Hermeneutic of *Theoria*

In addition, the Orthodox Church has its own hermeneutic method of interpreting the Scriptures, including the more obvious passages on Creation. This hermeneutic, called *theoria*, has been effectively argued as a sound and balanced method of interpreting the Scriptures for Orthodoxy. Further, in the life of Orthodox believers, *theoria* has profound implications about how they should approach creation.

Fr. John Breck has outlined the principles needed to understand Orthodox *theoria* and the resultant differences from other Western Christian approaches to the interpretation of the Word of God. He outlines eight basic presuppositions to develop what he describes as the "contemplative vision of *theoria*."⁸⁷

1. The first is that, for the Church Fathers, the term Word of God refers "to the eternal Logos, the God-Man who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth and is glorified in the Church as 'One of the Holy Trinity'."⁸⁸ Thus, it is a person "who communicates his revelation through the Canonical Scriptures"⁸⁹ giving "three distinct but intimately related realities: the Person of the divine Logos, the written witness to him in the form of apostolic writings and proclamation *of* him as an invitation to faith and life *in* him."⁹⁰

This is more than just preaching the Bible.

86. But only in the context of an ecumenical council.

87. J. Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2001), p. 38.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

2. This phrase must always be viewed in the context of the Trinity that shares "a common will and activity in inspiring the composition and interpretation of biblical writings, just as they do in the work of creation and redemption."⁹¹ Thus, revelation "proceeds from the Father through the Son and becomes intelligible in the Holy Spirit, while our response of receptivity, grounded in faith, proceeds in and from the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father."⁹²

3. The Word of God must be viewed as a divine-human or theandric reality. Thus, "the Scriptures are God's Word to his human creatures, and not merely human words about God."⁹³ At the same time, a *synergy* between God and his human agents is involved. These agents were sinful, limited and spoke out of their respective historical, cultural and linguistic context. Thus, it "must be interpreted anew in every generation of the church's life."⁹⁴ The Spirit enlightens each generation in the language of their time.

4. "The Church is the proper locus for the interpretation as well as for the proclamation and liturgical celebration of the Word of God."⁹⁵ Personal interpretation is encouraged but such people must "forfeit their claim to authority if they sever their connection with the ecclesial Body and its Tradition."⁹⁶ Thus, Orthodox exegetes see themselves as serving the mind of the Church. This requires the conviction that their labor is guided and inspired by the Spirit of truth. Breck makes the point that new discoveries from other sciences might seem to call into question findings from earlier generations. But has anyone offered "proofs" which would question basic Christian dogmas? Conclusions drawn from these findings are subjective, rational extrapolations.⁹⁷

5. The reason for this is that Orthodoxy sees Scripture as a product of the

91. Ibid.

92. Op. cit., p.39.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Op. cit., p.40.

Tradition or living faith of the Church. Thus, it only has canonical authority "in so far as it receives the gospel message, interprets it correctly, then transmits it so that others might believe."⁹⁸ For example, in 1 Cor. 15: 1-11, its purpose is to transform the Tradition "from a body of historical data into a life-giving Word which elicits the faith that leads to salvation."⁹⁹

6. "The Old and New Testaments represent a unified witness to salvation history. The relation between the two Testaments is that of promise and fulfillment."¹⁰⁰ Thus, key persons and events of the New Testament are prefigured in the Old Testament and always in reference to Christ. This method was used by the Fathers and is called Typology.¹⁰¹ Thus, for example, the New Adam versus the Old Adam. What is important in Orthodoxy, which developed from the Antiochian Fathers, is that the typology is in fact based on an historical account from the Old Testament. This is more important than an idea or interpretation and on this level, Orthodox *theoria* agrees with Biblical historical criticism. Thus, it needs to be supplemented by other scientific methods to establish its authenticity but at the same time, typology must remain a key element in discerning God's activity within history.¹⁰²

7. "All of Scripture is uniformly and integrally inspired and points to Christ."¹⁰³ Thus, "any passage can be interpreted so as to reveal its messianic message"¹⁰⁴ and need not be confined within the bounds of historical conceptions of reality. The Spirit blows where He wills.

8. Finally, God reveals Himself in the fullest way through prayer that occurs in the depths of the heart. Prayer is the fruit of the Spirit who dwells with the temple of the

98. Op. cit., p.41.

99. Op. cit., p.42.

100. Ibid.

101. J. Breck, *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY. 1986), p. 97.

102. J. Breck, *Scripture in Tradition*, op. cit., p.42.

103. Ibid.

104. Op. cit., p.43.

heart, understood in biblical tradition as the center of thought as well as emotion. Prayer is thus a divine operation, the work of God within us. "In prayer, God speaks to God: the Holy Spirit addresses the Father, to provide our intercessions, supplications and praise with substance and authority."¹⁰⁵

Thus, the aim of *theoria* is to uncover events of the Scriptures for the spiritual life of the believing community.¹⁰⁶ "It is therefore the vision of the interpreter rather than of the prophet"¹⁰⁷ which looks for the meanings of words within the event. Its aim is to preserve the typology but also to avoid the dehistoricizing tendency of allegory. It aims to receive "the existence of a typological relationship between two persons, objects, institutions or events."¹⁰⁸ Thus, there is a promise or fulfillment but also a participation in that fulfillment. This enables the Christian to discern its soteriological meaning and also participate in it personally in communion with the Church as a whole. *Theoria* then becomes part of the Tradition of the Church where the event is recollected, interpreted and then gives illumination to the living community.¹⁰⁹ There is a two-step process from the literal meaning of a text to a spiritual meaning, which embraces and unifies every aspect of biblical interpretation: from exegesis to liturgical hymnography.¹¹⁰

A true theologian aims to open his or her heart and mind to divine grace to be able to receive this vision. The resulting *synergism* or cooperation between God and humans is what enables one to properly interpret the Truth of the scriptures. Breck makes the point that the original Antiochian exegetes who developed this method "were then able to go beyond the limits of history without denying it."¹¹¹ The interpretation of Scripture is not incompatible with its scientific methods but it must be recognized that Christ will

105.Ibid.

106.J. Breck, *The Power of the Word*, op. cit., p.99.

107.Ibid.

108.Op. cit., p.103.

109.Op. cit., p.110.

110.Op. cit., p. 111f.

111.Op. cit., 111.

only reveal his grace through the Scriptures and Tradition. Once again, one cannot go beyond this framework. He goes on to say that *theoria* therefore embraces and unifies all aspects of biblical interpretation but at the same time enables the church to express its own faith through the use of liturgical poetry. Thus, these aspects all complement each other through *theoria*.¹¹²

In summary, *theoria* accepts the Canonical Scriptures and corresponding historical facts at face value but this does not ignore the need for Scriptural analysis. What it does do is reflect on the theological mystery of a passage by contrasting paradoxes from it. For instance, an important one is that of the Virgin's birth which is often reflected upon in our liturgical prayers. These prayers contrast the mystery of the creator of the universe being contained within the womb of the Virgin. How it happened is inexplicable. The Orthodox method is to theorize on this - thus, the word *theoria*. The former Mayor of New York, Rudolf Guiliani, recently gave another current paradox. When he was asked to reflect on September 11, 2001, he said it was the worst day in the city's history but at the same time, the moment of its greatest renewal, because of the tremendous courage shown in response to the tragedy. No one who was close to what happened would doubt the profound truth of this mystery. Likewise, no one would attempt to prove or quantify it. *Theoria* reflects on such mysteries. One example taken from our liturgical prayers is used in conjunction with the Beatitudes in the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy:

Verily, Adam, because of a tree, became estranged from paradise. But the thief because of the tree of the Cross came to reside in paradise. The former, when he tasted of the fruit, disobeyed the commandment of the Creator; and the latter, when he was crucified with thee, confessed that thou art a God disguised, and cried, Remember me in thy kingdom.¹¹³

112. Op. cit., p. 112.

113. S. Nassar, edit., *Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ* (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, NJ. 1979), p.167.

Theoria and the Environment

Even though I have been specifically examining biblical interpretation, this vision of *theoria* is also very important when looking at the environment. The importance in incorporating *theoria* into the ecological crisis is that it enables one to submit oneself to the Spirit so that this Spirit will reveal the truth to us and enable us to respond to it in this synergistic relationship. For Orthodox Christians, it is not just a question of reflecting on the crisis in order to act on it. The reflection must use the theology and liturgical prayers already in the Tradition to lead us to liturgize this crisis. In fact, we must liturgize the world.¹¹⁴

The crisis for Orthodox is not in the physical symptoms, which we see, but in the underlying catastrophe of the Fall. We were rescued from it by the second person of the Trinity, or Logos, entering into history and sacrificing himself as a human being. In doing this, he took away the finality of the impasse created by the fall of the separation of our souls and bodies or, death. The powers of Hell created this finality but the person of Christ destroyed it when his godly light burst forth from him in that realm when he descended into Hell. From the point of view of creation, it too was freed from the finality of this impasse and our priestly role calls us to intercede on its behalf both spiritually and physically, until Christ comes again at the Eschaton. The hermeneutic of *theoria* helps us to reflect on this mystery.

Orthodox Worship and *Theoria*

There are many Orthodox liturgical prayers that do this.¹¹⁵ For instance, in the

114. Vincent Rossi, *Liturgizing the World: Religion, Science and the Environmental Crisis in light of the Sacrificial Ethic of Sacred Cosmology*. Paper given at the Conference Sponsored by Religious Education and the Environmental Crisis, London, October 19, 1996.

115. Vrame, in his beautiful book, *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way* (Holy cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1999), pp. 166-170, approaches *theoria* from the point of view of Icons and includes a segment on the theology of creation. The cost of including a copy of a color Icon was too prohibitive to include here. I do intend however to include a session in the doctoral project to explain the icons in our church from the point of view

Sunday Orthros Service before Divine Liturgy, it says:

Let creation rejoice... for Christ our Saviour did nail our sins upon his Cross;... and did raise the fallen Adam and all his descendants...O inscrutable Creator,... verily, hades when it met thee below did murmur... and Adam, when he saw thee beneath the earth did stand up and arise.¹¹⁶

In regard to the resurrection it says:

Thy Resurrection, O Christ Saviour, hath illumined the whole universe. Thou hast renewed thy creation, O Lord Almighty. Glory to thee. By the Tree, O Saviour, thou hast removed the curse that was caused by a tree¹¹⁷

Another prayer states:

The whole creation, O Lord God, hath been lighted by thy glorified Resurrection; and paradise hath been opened withal. Wherefore, all creatures laud thee and offer thee praise perpetually.¹¹⁸

In regard to Christ's sacrifice, the highlight of the procession of the cross on Holy Thursday evening is the singing of these words:

Today, is hung upon the Cross, He Who suspended the Earth amid the waters. A crown of thorns crowns Him, Who is the King of Angels. He, Who wrapped the Heavens in clouds, is clothed with the purple of mockery.¹¹⁹

Another liturgical highlight is the blessing of water at the feast of the Theophany (January 6). The prayers of blessing say: "Today, the nature of the waters is sanctified"¹²⁰ and it goes on:

Today hath shone the Sun that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord. Today the moon shineth with the world in its radiating beams. Today the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendor of their radiance. Today the

of creation.

116.S. Nassar, *Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ* (Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and All North America, Brooklyn, NY. Second edit., 1961), pp. 138-139.

117. Op. cit., p.146.

118. Op. cit., p.152.

119.G. L. Papadeas, *Greek Orthodox Holy Week & Easter Services* (Patmos Press, South Daytona, FL. 1997). p. 238.

120.*The Liturgikon: The Book of Divine Services for the Priest and Deacon* (Antakya Press, Englewood. NJ), Second Edit., 1993, p.440.

clouds from heaven moisten mankind with showers of justice. Today the Uncreated accepteth of his own will the laying on of hands by his own creation.¹²¹

Another passage within this service is so rich with such examples, it is worth quoting much of it:

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit hath descended on the waters in the likeness of a dove. Today hath shone the Sun that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord. Today the moon shineth with the world in its radiating beams. Today the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendor of their radiance. Today the clouds from heaven moisten mankind with showers of justice. Today the Uncreated accepteth of his own will the laying on of hands by his own creation. Today the Prophet and Forerunner dreweth nigh to the Master but halteth with trembling when he witnesseth the condescension of God towards us. Today the waters of the Jordan are changed to healing by the presence of the Lord. Today the whole creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the stumblings of mankind are blotted out by the waters of the Jordan. Today hath paradise been opened to men, and the Sun of righteousness hath shone for us. Today are we delivered from the ancient mourning, and like a new Israel we have been saved. Today we have escaped from darkness and, by the light of the knowledge of God, we have been illuminated. Today the darkness of the world vanisheth with the appearance of our God. Today is error annulled, and the coming of the Master prepareth for us a way of salvation. Today the celestials celebrate with the terrestrials, and the terrestrial commune with celestials....¹²²

Ultimately, they are highlighted in the Eucharist. This is why Patriarch Bartholomew¹²³ said that the real solution to the crisis would only come through the Eucharist. It is there that we offer back to God this fallen creation with "tears of repentance" but with a constant hope that God's mercy will transform this fallen state back to the image in which it was originally created.

Some Orthodox Parameters

Having looked at the content of the biblical message on creation and examined

121. Op. cit., p.446.

122. Op. cit., pp.446-447.

123. Address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the *Environmental Symposium*, Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, CA 8 Nov., 1997. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate Web Site.

important Orthodox biblical principles of interpretation and application, I now want to look at some basic theological principles or parameters that should give an overall perspective of this issue.

In recent years, prominent Orthodox leaders, including Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Patriarch Ignatios of Antioch, have highlighted the urgency and eclectic¹²⁴ nature of this challenge.

The first ecological parameter is to recognize that the mystery of God is vitally connected to this environment we find ourselves in. Orthodoxy believes that the desire of Western Christendom to prove the existence of an infinite being is misplaced and flawed. It is misplaced because it depersonalizes God and distances him and from the cosmos he created. It is flawed because it attempts to confine the Godhead to mathematical terms.¹²⁵ We believe instead that God is beyond mathematics and so, all one can do is accept the existence of God. Thus, it is an Orthodox premise that one can come to a belief in the Godhead by reflecting on the beauty of the Cosmos.¹²⁶ Beyond this, one must look to the God of revelation in the scriptures to define the Godhead.¹²⁷ Thus, from these two sources, the Church has concluded that God is one but at the same time three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In mathematics, this makes no sense.¹²⁸ It is also a mystery because the otherness of the One God prevents us from ever understanding the inner workings of the Trinity. This is why nothing other their relationships have been defined.

What Orthodoxy does distinguish is between the Trinity's inner workings and its outward manifestations or energies.¹²⁹ Most Western theologians are not familiar with

124. I use this word deliberately because it can involve the largest global scale but it is also relevant at the local level in how we choose to dispose of garbage or the temperature of our houses.

125. V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1989), p. 38.

126. J. Chryssavgis, op. cit. pp. 9 -10.

127. P. Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1998), p. 86.

128. V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1989), p. 38.

129. J. Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Light & Life Publishing, Minneapolis, Minnesota,

this distinction but Orthodoxy believes that without it, one cannot understand the immanence of God, which is similarly present with his transcendence. This too is a mystery. For Orthodox Christians, the only way to reach beyond the physical realm to the mystery of God is to "marvel at the wonder of this ineffable power"¹³⁰ to quote St. Gregory of Nyssa. Thus, a reflection of the mystery and wonder of the cosmos is a necessary initial step in understanding our role in it. At the same time, it is the task of the sciences to examine its outward manifestations or energies. Most scientists would agree that their work could not directly answer questions on the Godhead. Patriarch Bartholomew makes the fundamental point that science and theology need each other and should be partners. "We ought not to divide the one reality."¹³¹ He says that if they work together, it will bring us hope instead of despair and this cooperation will "release healthful energies for restraint and change."¹³² Thus, one must accept the divine aspect of the mystery of Creation as a basic premise. To take an opposing Atheistic stand only leads to chaos.

For example, the sort of conclusions which scientists will come to without this cooperation can be seen in the August 1998 edition of *Sky & Telescope*.¹³³ Two astrophysicists, Fred C. Adams and Gregory Laughlin, wrote an article giving an overview on the current opinion of how the universe as we physically know it will end. The question from a scientific point of view depends on the density of the universe. Several types of observations were made that year which appear to be conclusive that this density is less than a critical value, which would enable the universe to remain flat. In other words, the

1999), pp. 71-89, 85-86. Also, V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1989), pp. 45-69.

130.F. W. Krueger, *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity* (The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, Santa Rosa, CA, 2002) Fourth Edition, p. 106.

131. *Revelation and the Environment AD 95-1995*. The Address of His All Holiness, The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, upon the opening of *The International Environmental Symposium at Sea*. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchal Web Site.

132. Ibid.

133. *Sky & Telescope*, August 1998, Vol. 96, Number 2, *The Future of the Universe*, by Fred C. Adams and Gregory Laughlin, (Sky Publishing Corp. Cambridge, MA, USA), pp. 32-41.

often-mentioned speculation of a "big crunch" where the universe will eventually turn in on itself to return to a black hole, by the force of gravity, will probably not happen. Instead, it seems that the universe will gradually expand and dissipate within a huge time scale.¹³⁴

These observations led the authors to a number of conclusions. In the first place, just as when Copernicus realized that the earth is not at the center of our solar system, they have concluded that the solar system has no special place in the space of the entire universe. The same holds for the vast expanses of cosmic time.¹³⁵ Thus, they conclude, "this principle exorcises the last vestiges of anthropocentric thought".¹³⁶ Further, they speculate that general modern day concerns such as nuclear destruction, ecological catastrophes, mutant viruses, asteroid impacts and even the possibility of space stations, or in other words, humanity's future survival, are still subject to the prospect that all matter, consciousness and purpose will dissipate and annihilate.¹³⁷ Therefore, they say that all this speculation on humanity's survival "holds an inordinate fascination"¹³⁸ and that the future of life should be left to the future. This view is fairly representative of scientists who reject God as being part of the scheme of creation. Scientists such as Adams and Laughlin choose to ignore the whole question of our future survival by reflecting on the immensity of time. If one chooses to avoid the challenge of our future survival, surely one can only come to a conclusion of despair. This worldview is incompatible with Orthodoxy.

What too, can one say about the biblical accounts of creation in the light of modern scientific cosmological theories? It should be noted that Orthodoxy sees the

134. Ibid. p. 32, the time scale they estimate is in the order of 10 to the power of 120! That is, 10 plus 120 zeroes after it, which is barely comprehensible. Numerous other observations and methodologies have supported their observations since then.

135. Op. cit., p. 39.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Ibid.

biblical stories of creation as describing what was the case before the fall. At that point, our first parents were not subject to the ravages of nature. Thus, it does not see any necessary connection between the theory of evolution and our origin. Science may well shed light on how we physically came to exist on this planet, in our solar system, in the Milky Way, within this universe at a certain point in time. Yet, this will ultimately have no bearing on the mystery that God intervened in history and created male and female persons in His image and likeness and that we are their descendants. Likewise, God's call to us "to have dominion" over creation (Gen. 1:28) was within the realm of the kingdom of God and should not be interpreted as domination, let alone the abuse of creation. After the fall, however, the image and likeness were clouded and we became subject to the laws of nature especially regarding our physical death.

The second parameter is that, in accepting this mystery, Orthodoxy believes that one must also embrace an attitude of hope that this fallen creation (which brought about what we perceive to be the material world today) will be restored at the Eschaton¹³⁹. This is because the Scriptures reveal that there is more to creation than just the material and that God intervened into history to restore the devastation caused by the fall.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve had been warned not to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:16-17) because "on the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Gen. 2:17) When they disobeyed, the consequences were devastating. Genesis continues, "cursed is the ground because of you..." (Gen. 3:17-19) At that moment, the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation was disrupted (cf. Rom. 8:20).¹⁴⁰ There is an interdependence between humanity's fall and the material world.¹⁴¹ The material world became enslaved in sin because of it. This was not natural

139. Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1979), pp. 28-30.

140. G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment*, trans. by Elisabeth Theokritoff, (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2001), p.69.

141. Op. cit., p.70

but all creation became a victim of it. It lost its position that God had planned for it before the fall.¹⁴² Thus, "creation refuses to be subject to man once he has transgressed."¹⁴³ In a sense, a type of global winter descended upon the earth indicating its new unwillingness to be subject to us anymore. Thus, humanity disrupted its relationship with the world and is responsible for its fall also. It lead it astray and corrupted it.¹⁴⁴

In other words, the hardships we face today were brought about by our own actions. This impasse could only be broken by the Word of God becoming man and obediently sacrificing himself in order to atone for the disobedience of Adam. But, as Christ's baptized disciples, we too are called to respect creation and intercede on its behalf so that it may be sanctified once again. The material and spiritual worlds need to continually be reunited until Christ comes again. Our tendency to ignore the plight of creation, only worrying about ourselves, is the consequence of the fall and is the opposite of God's plan for us to "care for the earth." (Gen. 2:15) Our inclination towards autonomy, where everything becomes fragmented, is a direct consequence of the fall and is the very thing we must resist. If we do not, the material effects of pollution and the loss of species we observe will only get worse and become a global catastrophe. Global conflicts could even develop over the control of energy such as oil supply. Likewise, the presumption that economic considerations be given priority is a direct consequence of the greed, which came from the sin of Adam and Eve. In contrast, the material world cannot do without the spiritual and vice versa. As Patriarch Bartholomew says, science and religion need each other. In living out the spiritual role of interceding on behalf of and sanctifying creation, we must follow him who sacrificed himself, not just for us but also for the whole cosmos.

142.Ibid.

143.Ibid.

144.Op. cit., p.70.

The great hope for Orthodox Christians is that the second person of the Trinity will fully restore the created universe when He comes a second time. Further, this hope is connected to an acceptance of a two-fold definition of the future as described by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.¹⁴⁵ The first is the classic scientific approach, which extrapolates from the past to predict the future. The second is our ability to wonder at what is beyond our control and what will come upon us. We have been given the ability to perceive the unknown. The latter is God given but if it is ignored, we will stifle future possibilities. Its opposite, a sense of fatalism (which is often expressed in secularist, pantheistic and existentialist world views and is expressed by Adams and Laughlin), is futile and very debilitating when trying to grapple with ecological issues. Thus, Patriarch Ignatius IV concludes: "If we think that nature is sufficient, that it can be reduced to a combination of blind processes in a world which is both immense and closed, then nature has no meaning and death has the last word."¹⁴⁶ Like it or not, we must recognize these inner perceptions which indicate that there is more to our existence than just the material. On the question of the environment, we cannot ignore the radicalness of this presumption if we are to address it. There is no other choice.

The third parameter is that, humanity must recognize its unique relationship between the Godhead and the cosmos. Patriarch Ignatius says that "Man is a Microcosm, a synthesis of all creation, which we can therefore know from within; he is the interface between the visible and the invisible, the carnal and the spiritual."¹⁴⁷ Yet, it is because of our disobedience that humanity's "image and likeness of God" has been obscured. This disobedience precipitated creation's fall, which is dependent on us and is what has caused the ecological crisis today. Patriarch Bartholomew says we must realize instead that our

145.Patr. Bartholomew, *Revelation and the Environment*, AD 95-1995

146.Ignatius IV, *An Orthodox Theology of Creation*, given in Switzerland, (Green Cross, Santa Rosa, CA. 1989), p. 6.

147.Op. cit., p.3.

resultant desire for greed and exploitation must be replaced with "tears of repentance"¹⁴⁸ and asceticism. So, we must play our part by becoming one with nature through asceticism and by contemplating the beauty of the cosmos. We must, therefore, restore our sense of wonder of creation.

Science has a vital role to play because it gives us the instrumental eyes to see creation in detail and so, enables us to better physically restore the ecological balance. At the same time, unless the above principles are taken into account, we will not be able to fully address this crisis. Pessimism will set in, precipitating an ever-deepening crisis.

Necessary Ecological Links for Orthodoxy

Having given an overview of the basis of an Orthodox approach, some detail needs to be given about what I regard as certain missing links which need to be recognized in the theological discussions which have taken place on this issue.

1. Natural Contemplation

The first follows from the third point mentioned above and is called Natural Contemplation. This is defined as that “stage of spiritual life which comes between *action* and theology.”¹⁴⁹ Its aim is the “study of God’s ‘word’ in nature and the discovery of His personal and creative uniqueness through the beauty, artistry and wisdom of existent things.”¹⁵⁰

This aspect was developed by such fathers as Origen, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Nilus and St. Maximos the Confessor and has been preserved by the Antiochian and Syrian Christians. As one of many who spoke about this, St. Irenaeus of Lyons said that creation is a reflection of the creator and this

148. Patr. Bartholomew, *Revelation and the Environment*, AD 95-1995

149. G. Keselopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

150. *Ibid.*

understanding of it was inherited from the apostles.¹⁵¹ It had a profound influence on the life of all Orthodox Christians¹⁵² up until the "assassination of Byzantium," in 1453, as Patriarch Ignatios called it.¹⁵³ Since then, this aspect was relegated to a number of monasteries,¹⁵⁴ even though its theology and ascetic aspect would continue to influence Eastern and Western Christendom.

Many Christians realize that to seriously take on the role of being a disciple of Christ involves striving to deepen their relationship with Him throughout their lives. Among the Church Fathers, St. Gregory of Nyssa was one of the clearest exponents to describe this movement or process¹⁵⁵ and in doing so, he provided the framework for the practice of contemplation. For him, it cannot properly begin without an appreciation of the created world, but the process involves going beyond the visible to what he regards as its source, which is the invisible creator or the Triune God. For Gregory, there are three fundamental practices that we must begin in order for this movement to commence.

The first is that we must purify our hearts. Using Luke 17:21 (The kingdom of God is within you), he says that "this teaches us that the man who purifies his heart of every creature and of every passionate impulse will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty."¹⁵⁶ He also says that every person has this within his grasp. Using the image of a rusted iron rod, he says that our interior or "heart" must be scraped clean "of the rust like dirt that has accumulated"¹⁵⁷ on it. When a person does this, "he will see within himself the object of his desire; and thus he will become blessed, for in gazing

151. Quoting *Against Heresies*, Book II, ch. 9:1, from Fr. W. Krueger, *edit. A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity* (The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, Santa Rosa, CA. 2002), p.28.

152. Ignatius IV, *An Orthodox Theology of Creation*, pp. 3-7.

153. *Op. cit.*, p.11.

154. *Ibid.*

155. *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* edit. by J. Danielou, S.J. & H. Musurillo, S.J., (Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, 1961).

156. *Op. cit.*, p.101.

157. *Ibid.*

upon his own purity he will see the archetype within the image."¹⁵⁸ The eye of our heart will become clear. Further, since our heart "has been made by its Creator ever to keep changing ... we must prevent it from using up its energy on trifles, and keep it on all sides from doing what it should not."¹⁵⁹ When it does this, "it will be raised up by the very tendency of its motion towards a love of higher things."¹⁶⁰ Thus, the process is engaged.

Two other practices are needed however for the process to be successful. The first is what Orthodoxy describes as the Catoptratic method. This involves the sincere practice of church services and devotions, something expected from any Christian faith. But there is another aspect to this, which brings us to the first steps of contemplation. We must penetrate "into the nature of the soul and the qualities that are inherent in bodies."¹⁶¹ When examining various aspects of the soul or body, we must not only identify them but also look at their context, considering "all of them in their harmonious unity and their mutual relationship in the actual substance."¹⁶² For instance, when one looks at the beauty of an object, the unpurified intellect will only look at it from the angle of the pleasure it will give to the senses, either wanting to possess it or instead, make an idol out of it. The purified intellect, on the other hand, detaches his or herself from it recognizing it as "merely the material on which the archetype of beauty operates."¹⁶³ And "he uses what he sees merely as a step towards the vision of that spiritual beauty whose communication is the ultimate reason why all other things are rightly called beautiful."¹⁶⁴ Thus, the intellect must be trained "to separate the material element from the beauty inherent in it and to contemplate beauty in itself". He cites Psalm 18:2 as an example.¹⁶⁵ A person who engages in this practice "will become beautiful because he has drawn near

158.Op. cit., pp.101-102.

159.Op. cit., p.103.

160.Ibid.

161.Op. cit., p.107.

162.Ibid.

163.Ibid.

164.Op. cit., p.108.

165.Op. cit., p.109.

to Beauty; and there he will become as luminous as light because he is in communion with the true light. A person who seeks God in this way, has a soul that is truly like God"¹⁶⁶ and transforms his own beauty "by a participation and a reflection of that archetypal Good."¹⁶⁷ This is the aim of the Catophtic method.

The final practice is what Orthodoxy calls the Apophatic method. There is a sense of otherness about the Godhead, which we will never reach because we are mere creatures. Even so, this is something we must strive to become part of because in doing so, we strive to become the creatures God intended us to be. It is like "Entering the Dark Cloud."¹⁶⁸ As the soul makes progress and appreciates what the vision of the knowledge of this truth and beauty is, "the more does it see that the divine nature is invisible."¹⁶⁹ Thus, it leaves all surface appearances both of the senses and of the mind and "keeps on going deeper until by the operation of the spirit it penetrates the invisible and incomprehensible, and it is there that it sees God."¹⁷⁰ St. Gregory uses the example of Abraham who "went out, not knowing where he went (Heb. 11:8)."¹⁷¹ But, in doing this he constantly transcended "what he had grasped by his own power, for this was far inferior to what he sought."¹⁷² Further, Gregory notes that in Genesis 18:27, Abraham admits that he is incapable of explaining in a rational way the Godhead that his mind has seen. Thus, he makes the point that, as restless as the mind may be, "it has never yet discovered a way of comprehending eternity ... [to] go beyond the idea of eternity itself and that Being which is above all being."¹⁷³ All reason can do when it "touches on those things which are beyond it"¹⁷⁴ is "to keep silence (Eccles. 3:7); rather it keeps the wonder

166.Ibid.

167.Op. cit., p.110.

168.Op. cit., p.118. This is a title given by the editors.

169.Ibid.

170.Ibid.

171.Op. cit., p.119.

172.Op. cit., p.120.

173.Op. cit., p.127.

174.Ibid.

of that ineffable power within the secret of our conscience"¹⁷⁵ and "merely marvels at the vision of the magnificence of His glory. But again he is unable to see the substance of this glory; he is merely in amazement at the glory of His holiness."¹⁷⁶ When contemplating the wonder of His creation, "It is in this darkness that he sees the tabernacle not made by human hands."¹⁷⁷

St. Gregory's description of these three practices on how to progress in the spiritual life has become a benchmark for Orthodoxy.

One may ask: What connection does Natural Contemplation have to the current ecological issue? This question brings us to a fundamental principle. In order to understand our proper relationship to creation, we must first understand and see the purpose of our existence before we can participate and experience the reality of creation.¹⁷⁸ That purpose is to recognize God's unifying energy in every aspect of creation. When we look at creation, we must also see how God's eternal unifying energy sustains and energizes it. This is the *Logos* behind all creation and it is our task to recognize it. St. Symeon the New Theologian says that this sense of purpose is so important that it constitutes our salvation because it keeps us safe and whole.¹⁷⁹ This is so, because "the inner principles of things are always the unitive element which connects God's animate creation with His inanimate creation."¹⁸⁰ Only humans can make a connection with the "inner principle of each thing."¹⁸¹ Each connection becomes a discovery that makes it personal and eucharistic.¹⁸² It must be seen that "things in creation are not impersonal objects of use, but works and creation, the results of action

175.Op. cit., p.128.

176.Ibid.

177.Op. cit., p.130.

178.G. Keselopoulos, op. cit., p. 107.

179.Ibid.

180.Ibid.

181.Ibid.

182.Ibid.

and creation by a personal God.”¹⁸³ If such connections are not made, then the ecological issue will never be properly addressed. As I have stated, creation must be sanctified.

2. An Orthodox Anthropology

While the context of the ecological crisis has changed over the centuries, our anthropology has not and our personal response to the crisis is always based upon that anthropology. The original role that was intended for us before the fall is still there and we must examine our God created makeup to be able to respond properly. Thus, the second missing link that I want to discuss is our anthropology.

A major figure for the Church, both East and West, who provided its framework was St. Maximos the Confessor.¹⁸⁴ He bases our anthropology on his understanding of the Trinity. Using St. Gregory Nazianzus' notion that the Godhead's eternal movement towards the Trinity gave it a kind of perfection, St. Maximos says that the Trinity "marks the perfection of a living circle, the dynamics of divine Being who makes Himself personal."¹⁸⁵ The mystery of the Godhead lies not in the distinction between the one Godhead and the three persons but "in the manner of identity operative beyond it."¹⁸⁶ What we can say is that in any operation where we recognize God's activity, the one Godhead and the Trinitarian aspect can be identified and interchanged, even though a specific person of the Trinity is identified with the action. For example, when St. John mentions that the Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14).

In a similar way in which St. Gregory says that the beauty of the cosmos reflects its archetype, St. Maximos makes the crucial distinction between the mind, reason and spirit of humans, because humanity reflects the mind, logos and spirit of the Godhead.

183.Ibid.

184.Lars Thunberg, in his book, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximos the Confessor* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1985), gives a detailed outline on this topic. What follows is a summary.

185.Op. cit., p.36.

186.Ibid.

For him, they constitute an image of the Trinitarian archetype. Further, humanity's capacity to simplify and unify, together with his ability to seek goodness and liberate himself from divisiveness are a reflection of God. Thus, the "Father is the principle of unity, the Son is the manifestation of the goodness of God, and the Spirit is the power of unification."¹⁸⁷ This threefold anthropological distinction also gives us the ability to both unify and distinguish and this is what makes us unique in the created universe.¹⁸⁸

Other Orthodox theologians have elaborated on this three-fold distinction. The mind or intellect, which has the ability to unify and distinguish and therefore reach into the Godhead, goes above and beyond our capacity to reason with logic. It is able to reach beyond the physical, sensory world to the divine and is able to imagine and remember, as well as seek goodness and true virtues. The spirit is that part of us, which can reach into the unity of God and also is able to recognize how the entire created universe is unified in God.

These faculties, of course, can choose evil instead of good and the battleground where we exercise our wills is in the heart. This latter term is used in "biblical, patristic, theological and liturgical traditions of the Church."¹⁸⁹ It is the center of our deepest and truest self. It is also the battleground where we choose good or evil. Because the physical body, the senses and the emotions are prone to evil, they can distract those higher faculties from reaching into the unifying presence of the Godhead. For Orthodoxy, everything created by God according to its nature is good: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:4). This includes all the normal appetites that facilitate our day-to-day life. The fall of Adam and Eve, however, caused these appetites to become insatiable

187.Ibid.

188.Orthodoxy believes that the Scholastic, Roman Catholic emphasis on using reason (with language) as the distinguishing factor between humanity and the rest of the cosmos is misplaced. For instance, science has shown that numerous species of animal use language to communicate. Orthodoxy believes that, complimenting St. Maximos, is humanity's ability to be stewards, managers or custodians is its distinguishing characteristic and is biblically based.

189.C. Vrame, op. cit., p.81.

in their desires, belying their true role of supporting the higher faculties in their ability to focus on the source of their life. Thus, what is regarded, as "only natural" by many is, in fact, unnatural because God did not intend this in their nature. When the passions of the body control these faculties then the soul becomes blinded to God and may ultimately die. Due to the fall, our likeness to God has been greatly dimmed and while the above-described faculties are still present, a struggle must be maintained to control these passions from overriding them. Worse still, the intellect can use its faculties to delude itself that it is like God (cf. Gen. 3: 5), completely deadening its soul with pride.

At the same time, to try to ignore the appetites would not only not work but also deny what God has created. What is needed instead is a life style of asceticism to control them so that they serve the intellect, reason and soul and not the other way around. As fallen creatures, our appetites can easily turn into passions that will cloud these ideals and blind us from a true response. Further, to over emphasize the faculty of reason is to place it out of context, leaving it groundless and isolated, allowing its logical facility to spring off in any direction without a sense of purpose. In other words, reason on its own is not enough to enable us to make a proper response.

Likewise, the practice of asceticism is not something that is merely negative. When we live an ascetic life style, we embark on the struggle to become our true selves because our intellects are freed from the passions. When this happens, our intellects can strive for the God given calling to be custodians of the cosmos he gave us for future generations.

Genesis 2:15 mentions that Adam was instructed to till the earth and care for it. In fulfilling this, he was reflecting God's love for the whole of creation. St. Maximos says that all creation reflects the Trinity, Adam especially. Thus, he reflected God's being, wisdom and life.¹⁹⁰ Even though he fell, he and his descendents were still in the

190.L. Thunberg, op. cit., p.46.

image of God and, in so far as what we do in this life reflects these aspects of God, then we fulfill this role. When we live out the reflection of the unity together with the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead in our lives, then we are doing what God wants us to. When we free our intellects from the passions, we allow it to do just that. It is our calling to reflect on this mystery of the material world, which reflects the immaterial. If we fail to do this, we fail God.

Orthodoxy has long recognized this and so fasting is a central part of its way of life. Those Orthodox who embrace it fully will refrain from eating meat almost one in two days a year and for sixteen weeks each year will significantly reduce their food intake. It is unfortunate that the Roman Catholic Church dropped its fasting practices and Western Christendom does not provide any structure for its people to live in this way. Imagine the impact on the planet if it did. In ecology, it is necessary to recognize that our make up cannot be ignored and we must adjust our life style accordingly. Fr. Vincent Rossi¹⁹¹ makes the point that Western analytical methods tend to make us compartmentalize the anthropological unity we have between our body and soul, thus making us lose sight of the unity between the physical and spiritual world. We must recognize this unity to be able to respond effectively.

3. Confronting the Tendency to Fragment Ourselves

The third missing link we need to recognize is that of confronting the effect of secularism in today's world since its influence has caused society and many Christians to disconnect the environment from the divine life (or kingdom), which God intends for us.

It seems to me that Western¹⁹² Christians concerned about this issue, whilst

191. Vincent Rossi, *Liturgizing the World: Religion, Science and the Environmental Crisis in the light of the Sacrificial Ethic of Sacred Cosmology*, given in London, 1966 at the Religious Education and the Environment Project conference.

192. Again, I am referring to those teachings from the Roman Magisterium that separate the general priesthood of baptized Christians from ordained clergy to the extent that our baptismal intercessory role is played down. Roman theology has greatly developed since Vatican I but these

justifiably wanting to embark on specific practical projects to help improve the environment, have underestimated the importance of their priestly calling to intercede on its behalf in a liturgical and spiritual way. We need to do more than just gain knowledge on this subject that one is free to use or ignore. Rather, one must internalize this message in one's heart and soul, recognizing that the daily lives that we live out in this environment must be measured by this fundamental priestly role. The challenge is to show that this is not just an option but also something urgent. I believe that because of numerous historical distinctions made by the Roman Catholic Church in earlier centuries, the Western world has tragically lost the sense of urgency to have "Thy Kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven." I regard this as being a major missing link in making the general Christian populace conscious of this issue.

What follows is a description of this issue of secularism, giving firstly an historical outline, which will be followed by how it affects us today.

Historical Developments Towards Secularism: Fateful Distinctions from the Past

Alexander Schmemmann, in his book, *Church, World, Mission*,¹⁹³ gives a very poignant description, from an Orthodox stand point, of what went wrong with Western Christendom and how these misfortunes brought on the development of secularism.¹⁹⁴ His fundamental point is that, for the sake of order and stability, the Roman Catholic Church separated the Eschaton from the temporal world. The Kingdom of God became relegated to something that could be left to those end times of the future. This had catastrophic implications because it took away the sense of urgency, immanence and purpose of our faith. This however was not the only disastrous distinction it made. For practical reasons it separated the mystery of God from the secular experience, the latter

basic teachings still bear upon the Church.

193. Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1979).

194. Op. cit., pp. 25-84.

being now but the former would be something to come. Thus, we will only reach the transcendence of God in the future. It was for this reason that it distinguished between the "natural" and the "supernatural", "nature" and "grace". It was also reinforced by a fear of pantheism and resulted in a belief that after creation, God left the natural world to itself. Not only was the world that we experience presumed to be distant from God, the principle of creation was almost seen to be coexistent with God, creating the danger of a dualistic mode of creation.¹⁹⁵ To remove God from people's lives even further, Rome claimed that this "sanctifying grace" was a created medium.¹⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit could not be experienced directly and God's Kingdom was hardly something "at hand" to which we are now in passage. Instead, the world took on an autonomy¹⁹⁷ of its own where we concerned ourselves with the issues in front of us, not the future Kingdom. Alas, this is where secularism began. Schmemmann makes the point that the world has fallen (because of the sin of Adam) but it never became autonomous!¹⁹⁸ So, what would connect this secular world to God? For the Roman Church it was a juridical connection: keep its laws and everything will take care of itself.

To hammer the point even further, the Roman Church separated divine and secular law¹⁹⁹, with even more catastrophic results. Thus, its canons, which were from God, were divine and so, became absolutes in themselves. This was something never

195.P. Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1998), p.217. He also argues that this assumption has profound implications for the mind set of many who discuss this issue.

196.cf. E. J. Fortman, S.J., *The Theology of Man and Grace: Commentary* (The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1966), pp.166-201, especially the latter half of the chapter.

197.Lest one presumes that such a distinction is simplistic, it is worth quoting from the Documents of Vatican II, in *The Church Today* # 36: "If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy." From *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by W. M. Abbot, S.J., translated by V. Rev. Msgr. J. Gallagher, (Corpus Books, NY, 1966), p. 233. Cf. also p. 234.

198.Schmemmann, op. cit., pp. 61.

199.N. Afanasiev, *Canons and Canonical Consciousness* from Put' No. 39, 1993, Holy Trinity Home Page, Section 2 of the article.

intended in the original writings of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.²⁰⁰ The Protestants reacted by saying the scriptures are the divine law but church canon law, is only human. Church law and other affairs therefore became subject to secular authorities. Rome's counter was to say that divine laws dominated secular law. Thus, Roman authority became a relationship of power over secular society.²⁰¹ At the time of the Reformation, the Protestants reacted. Later, when these secular institutions found contradictions between ecclesiastical claims and empirical evidence (e.g. the Galileo controversy), they too reacted. This was devastating for the Roman Church but for the secular world, it hardly mattered.

What evolved was what Schmemmann called a "secularized eschatology."²⁰² Others call it anthropomorphism in which humanity has "a faith in the immanent fulfillment by man of his [own] dreams and aspirations."²⁰³ This translated into an unquestioning belief in history, justice, freedom etc., as absolute ideals. Sadly, Western Christendom has accepted this "secular faith" of the secular man on its own terms. This attempt, however, to find a common ground and language with the secular world has little to do with the Kingdom of God as revealed by God in Church Tradition. More importantly, it has moved the impetus for seeking answers to the truth from the spiritual sphere to the material one. The Church could be left to itself to speculate on its mythologies and other unknowable realms.²⁰⁴ This philosophy was crystallized by Immanuel Kant²⁰⁵ and those who succeeded him.

200.L. Patsavos, *The Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Cross Seminary, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Web Page, 1999), pp. 2-3. See also P. L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1996).

201.Schmemmann, op. cit., p. 61

202.Ibid.

203.Op. cit. p.63.

204.Ibid.

205.F.L. Cross, edit. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1974), p. 773.

Implications for the Theology of Creation in the West

These distinctions also affected the West's theology of creation. Because of St. Thomas Aquinas' emphasis on Aristotelian reason,²⁰⁶ he brought about a "divorce between the doctrine of Providence... and the doctrine of governance of the world."²⁰⁷ Thus, the link between the world and its creator is loosened and the living bond between the Creator and the creature is weakened.²⁰⁸ In effect, although he gives his own analysis of the biblical story of creation, he translates this truth "into more decidedly Aristotelian terms."²⁰⁹ Creation then tended to become a self-contained isolated event from the past²¹⁰ and the elements of christology and saving history in his theology of creation tend to go into the background.²¹¹ Over time, "Scholastic metaphysics increasingly isolated the truth of Creation from the supernatural."²¹² Although theology and philosophy remained side by side for a time, the Church became increasingly defensive as the philosophy of science developed. The result was that an antagonistic rivalry grew between science and religion with the latter losing out by the nineteenth century.²¹³ The Scholastic emphasis on reason left theologians of the West grappling for ways to answer the cosmological questions which science posed. Even today, Roman Catholic theologians are still attempting to redress this separation between salvation history and the creation of the world.

206.L. Scheffeczyk, *Creation and Providence* (Herder and Herder, New York, 1970), pp. 145-148.

207.Op. cit., p. 149.

208.Ibid.

209.Op. cit., p. 151.

210.Ibid.

211.Op. cit., p. 153.

212.Op. cit., p. 187.

213.Op. cit., p. 193.

For instance, Pieter Smulders, in an article on creation, uses the Augustinian concept that it was the love of God which brought about the creation of the universe rather than the inevitable consequences of reason: “Hence the concept of authorship is better than that of causality”²¹⁴ and creation “can have no other source or cause but the initiative of love.”²¹⁵ Like Philip Sherrard²¹⁶ Smulders cautions against “the danger of slipping into a sort of deism.”²¹⁷ Instead, “Creation is God’s beneficent action towards man.”²¹⁸

While this argument may sound plausible, my question is: How does it convince the scientist that his creative work also needs to be sanctified?

Likewise, Karl Rahner, in a similar article²¹⁹ tries to relate his epistemology to the revelation of creation in Scripture. Thus, he says the doctrine of creation is “presupposed by the doctrine of covenant”²²⁰ and “can achieve its purpose only if it always directs its attention towards man as the essence of creatureliness coming to consciousness.”²²¹ This is similar to an idea from Piet Schoonenberg who sees creation and humanity’s part in it

214. Smulders, Pieter and Darlap, Adolf, *Creation*, in the *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner, (Burns & Oates, London, 1975), p. 318.

215. Ibid.

216. P. Sherrard, *Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1998, pp. 232-244. As he says, "there is a relationship of interdependence, interpenetration and reciprocity between God, man and creation; and it is the loss by the Christian consciousness of the awareness of the full significance of this relationship that is a basic cause of today's ecological crisis." p. 243.

217. P. Smulders, op. cit., p. 318.

218. Op. cit., p. 318. Smulders and others recognize this emphasis on reason by the Roman Catholic Magisterium, which sees creation as an entity unto itself and virtually separated from God’s creative love. They have subsequently begun to search for different theological answers. Compare for instance *The Theology of Creation* by Robert Butterworth, S.J., in the *Theology Today Series* (The Mercier Press, Cork, 1969), which is very critical of the Magisterium’s approach to creation.

219. K. Rahner, *Doctrine of Creation*, in the *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner (Burns & Oates, London, 1975), p. 325.

220. Op. cit., p. 326.

221. Ibid.

as an evolving, emerging development.²²² Rahner links this idea up with Christ. Thus, “a doctrine of creation should ... be Christocentric”²²³ because it is only through the hypostatic union that humanity can be “orientated towards God’s communication of himself.”²²⁴ It is interesting that he says creation must be connected to salvation history because it gives man the context for “his freedom and his guilt (original sin) as well as his share in shaping history.”²²⁵

Aside from the philosophical problems of separating the material sphere from God, it must be said though that Orthodoxy does not believe God’s main purpose for us is to shape history through some type of emerging epistemology based on Trinitarian self-communication,²²⁶ as Rahner describes it. This premise is based on the supposition that reason is our distinguishing feature. In contrast, Orthodoxy would say that we have been commanded to have dominion over and care for the earth. For this reason, we are the interface between the material and spiritual spheres. Our role is to reunite them through priestly intercession, not to shape history with our emerging intellects. Orthodoxy would also say that we must be our true selves by striving to be what Adam and Eve were before the fall, not by trying to rectify the guilt we have supposedly received from the fall. The ever-looming crisis of the environment must force us to come to grips with what has been revealed to us about creation. It is not for revelation to fit in with developing philosophies.

Even the often-mentioned Orthodox lament of the Roman separation of Scripture

222.P. Schoonenberg, *The Christ*, translated by Della Couling, (Sheed & Ward, London, 1972), pp. 22 - 23.

223.Rahner, op. cit., p. 326.

224.Ibid.

225.Op. cit., p. 327.

226.Cf. K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel (Burns & Oates, London, 1970), pp. 80 – 115, especially p. 92.

from Tradition (the Living Faith of the Church) is connected to this issue. This separation of Scripture from its Tradition isolates it from all the other aspects of Church life through which God reveals Himself to us and this has caused the Scriptures to become disproportionately emphasized. Contrary to benefiting our understanding of God's revelation to us, this emphasis has caused it to be the subject of analytical observation, especially in the method of modern Form Criticism by Scripture scholars. I am not denying a place for analysis of the Scripture but the secular emphasis of placing all Scripture through the spectrum of Historical and Literary analysis has completely lost the point of what the Scriptures are supposed to be: viz.: the Word of God shining in our hearts so that we may seek the Light of the Godhead which will form us into His image and likeness. Those who want to objectivize the Scriptures have lost sight of the fact that they are actually intended to immerse us into the mystery and presence of God.²²⁷

Orthodoxy strives to maintain the faith of the New Testament and Church Fathers. For them, the Kingdom of God was so imminent that they had to grapple with the practical question of why they should not suspend their daily routines to wait for it to come. The tension of living "in the world" but not "of the world" was keenly and acutely felt. Most committed Christians feel this tension today but because of the above-described factors, the Church's ability to draw people from the world to itself has been hampered.

On the anthropological level, Orthodoxy believes that the soul yearns for God. If, in contrast to this, our secular education conditions our intelligence and imagination to accept that such yearning is unattainable or irrelevant, then the soul will be starved of

227. See, J. Breck, *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1986), especially Chapter IV, pp. 117-140.

nourishment.²²⁸ This gives us little choice but to either let the soul die or, react and find an alternative way to rekindle it. If the very connection to the Godhead is being questioned by some mainline churches, then many people will either look for something else that maintains the connection to the Divine or, simply reject Christianity altogether.

Secularism Today

Before looking at an Orthodox response, one must first examine some fundamental aspects about the concern of secularism in its current form.²²⁹ Secularism today has little connection to Christianity and many would say they are in opposition to each other²³⁰. Because secularism has won some significant legal victories, many would say it has become the new established religion. These victories include the banning of prayer from Federal Buildings (especially schools); the lack of federal or state financial funding for religious institutions and the insistence of secular curricular for those who receive any Federal funds; the prevention of Churches from influencing the ethical and moral decisions of individuals and public institutions, especially on the issue of abortion; the insistence on secular theories of creation and cosmology as the social standard in education. Likewise, certain feasts such as Good Friday have been eliminated from the secular calendar and others like the birth of Christ have been relegated to those mythical stories that are regarded as only being valuable for children's imaginations. The traditional forms of service of the Church, such as charity work, hospitals, schools, cultural development and art have been confined to solely their own domain, within their own physical boundaries and among their own people. Certainly, some such as depth

228. G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware, editors, *The Philokalia, Vol. II*. (Faber & Faber, London, Boston, Paper Back edit., 1990), especially, St. Maximos the Confessor on anthropology, pp. 202-209.

229. It would be impossible to fully cover the issue in a short description since it has many variables and in some ways virtually changes from day to day.

230. J. Allen, *The Ministry of the Church: Image of Pastoral Care*, (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1986), Chapter 8, pp. 201-213.

psychologists would also challenge even that sphere.²³¹ Many advocate that there should be a total separation between Church and State where Federal and State matters are concerned.²³²

As a result of such influences, many parishioners who are minimally educated in the Orthodox faith feel rather disarmed when trying to make sense and relate what they have learnt through the secular institutions which they went through, to their family and childhood faith in the triune Godhead and the Church. Further, the most visible contact they have with the Church, their liturgical experience, must seem confusing and more still, little connected to this secular realm in which they have grown up. The Church distinguishes between itself and "the world" and many of our people are content with this distinction to justify their continued attendance at Church. But others will not be so easily satisfied and such people could be lost to Orthodoxy if secularist influences are not firmly addressed.

4. Reestablishing the Connection to God

If one accepts what I have argued above that several crucial distinctions created by the Western Church have caused Christians (including many Orthodox Christians) to lose touch with their calling to relate everything in the material sphere to the Kingdom of God, then the challenge is to help them reestablish that link. What matters, is to realize that we must reach beyond this material realm and recognize that God has given us a real role to play in restoring the created world back to what it originally was.²³³ This role can be identified in every sphere of a person's life and our horizons must be challenged to

231. Op. cit., p. 209.

232. This is not intended to be a comment on the American Constitution in this country. Even so, none one would disagree that many people are opposed to the degree to which this separation has gone in recent years and believe that the founding fathers of this country would also have opposed it.

233. G. Keselopoulos, op. cit., pp. 152-162.

move away from our self-centered orientation ²³⁴ to see how to live it out.

This role is our priestly, intercessory role, which God has called us to ²³⁵, and which, as baptized Christians, we share in. God has called us to be a holy and priestly people and we must become conscious of this unique divine priestly role we have that calls us to intercede on behalf of the material world. This will be an important objective of the doctoral project.

What Churches often forget is that there is more involved with personal sanctification than just private devotions. ²³⁶ It must be realized that the many practical factors involved in running a church also have a theological dimension and that they must also be sanctified through offering such tasks back to God in the context of the Eucharist. When this happens, all of creation is included in a priestly way. Thus, I believe that the priestly Anaphora Prayer: “Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee, in behalf of all, and for all” ²³⁷ is the key where the material world is related to the divine.

The theme of unifying the two worlds is very important in Orthodoxy. Here, we

234. Cf. J. Allen, op. cit., pp. 205-208.

235. Op. cit., pp. 30-35.

236. I am thinking here of the 19th Century influences of Puritanism and Jansenism. Obviously, many factors will contribute to parish inertia, depending on its context. For instance, my parish is also only now emerging from the then necessary but inwardly looking mentality of surviving as a migrant parish. Further, it seems that many (perhaps most) Churches have clear policies on social justice and environmental matters that are based on the Scriptures. Consider, for instance, the document *Hope for a Global Future: Towards Just and Sustainable Human Development* (208th General Assembly Presbyterian Church, 1996), especially pages 57-73. Indeed, my experience with the Eco-Justice Working Group of the NCCC, is that there are many inspiring and admirable projects being done on the environment by Churches, which link them to the Christian call for social justice. The Orthodox Christian contribution to that forum is its proclamation that such projects can and need to be sanctified through our priestly calling as baptized Christians. The danger is to neglect this aspect. My aim with this doctoral project is to make my parishioners aware of the philosophical influences previously described to help them emerge from looking inward to the wider picture instead.

237. *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church* (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, NJ, Ninth edit., 1993), p. 113.

receive the world from God as a gift and return it in thanksgiving as Eucharist.²³⁸ This mystery of the divine Eucharist is the stage for our liturgical life²³⁹ and "becomes the means whereby God's redemptive and transfiguring activity is continued in time."²⁴⁰ It is also the place where the transcendent and unapproachable God is seen and eaten by human beings.²⁴¹ When we partake in the Eucharist, offering the world back to God, we cooperate "in manifesting the beauty of the earth as a continuously operative blessing of God"²⁴² and it is in this realm that we overcome "the division between paradise and the world."²⁴³ Thus, when the bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ, it "is both the first fruits and the goal of the ultimate transfiguration and renewal of the world."²⁴⁴

Thus, after this prayer, the people respond appropriately: "We praise thee, we bless thee, we give thanks unto thee, O Lord..."²⁴⁵ Likewise, before Communion, the theme of sanctification continues when the priest prays: "Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake thereof."²⁴⁶ It must also be remembered that this same Holy Spirit, which transforms the bread and wine, sanctifying our fallen world for it to be restored back to God, will ultimately restore all things at the Eschaton. We must avoid any tendency to "privatize" the Eucharist for one's personal devotion, because when this event is viewed in the context of the Kingdom of God, with its cosmic implication to

238.G. Keselopoulos, op. cit., p.164.

239.Op. cit., p.165.

240.Ibid.

241.Op. cit., p.166.

242.Op. cit., p.167.

243.Ibid.

244.Ibid.

245.*Service Book*, op. cit., p. 113.

246.Op. cit., p. 120.

restore this world back to the Kingdom, we gain a sense of the urgency that this is fundamentally the only true work which will last and that we must strive vigorously to do what we can to bring it about both within ourselves and others. This is the true response to the Eucharist. Otherwise, it is in danger of becoming little more than a set of rituals, which may evoke a sense of devotion or nostalgia but do little to help the person fully appreciate their priestly mission.

Thus, questions such as: "How do the Liturgical Calendar, the prayers of the Services of the Church, the scripture readings and their connection to the Tradition of the Church relate to today?" and "How can one make the congregation see how their daily lives relate to the kingdom of God?" are fundamental. To put it another way, how does today's world enter into the mystery of God?

Going Out Into the World

The challenge must however go beyond entering into this mystery to actually going back into the world to minister to it. Again, the question of dealing with the secularized world must be faced.

In the area of service, I think what has been lost is not the recognition of the necessity of service from a Christian community but that all areas of service take on a profoundly more important role than a pragmatic or social one. Every area of service, every work or act done by a parish is one of reconsecration to God. Further, this work is not limited to the traditional tasks of visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for our families, fighting for justice etc., but everything should be given back to God to be made holy once again. This responsibility encompasses not just what we see in front of us but

the whole of creation. It is little wonder that those saints who have attained union with God have an immeasurable love for the whole universe.

What is just as important is that the practical decisions made by the parish community must be environmentally responsible because it is part of its role as God's stewards on earth. The more it is seen that this ministry is for all of creation and not just to one's neighbors, the more zeal one will have for this calling. The reason is that one's calling is lived out in the particular context of their life in their day-to-day work or study. It is not just a matter of having the people feel good when they leave church. They must know how to act in such a way that what ever they do will be the best way possible to bring their sphere of the universe, no matter how minuscule it may seem, to be reconsecrated to God. One cannot help but be enthusiastic about one's work and time if one realizes that yes, it does have a profound effect on creation!

For the issue of ecology, Orthodoxy strongly believes that the secularist psychology of the Western world has to be turned upside down. Its insistence that only the material sphere be considered and that everything be compartmentalized, forces those concerned to miss the mark on what is central to the issue: viz., that underlying the symptoms of global warming, pollution and the destruction of natural resources, is our call from God to give back to him what he has given us so that he will guide us to restore it. This has been the message right through the Scriptures. In Orthodox language, we are called to sanctify the world.

A wonderful example of this can be found in the book of Daniel 3: 1-23, when the three holy youths, confronted with a horrible torture, turn to God in repentance for strength. God responds by sending angels to protect them. They, in turn, intercede for the very creation that would have destroyed them, by praising God for all the elements of life. The Orthodox Church reflects upon this theme in the Holy Saturday morning service, just before the gospel passage (Mt. 28: 1-20) is read about the discovery of the

empty tomb. The epistle of Romans 6: 3-11 is also read and links this with the theme of dying to ourselves and gaining newness of life in Christ by baptism. This newness of life gives us the ability to intercede on behalf of creation. Finally, just before the gospel passage, we call upon God to take charge of creation in the verse: "Arise O God, and judge the earth; for You shall take all nations to your inheritance."²⁴⁷ The verses go on to ask the rhetorical question of how long shall the injustices of the world continue? The implied answer is that Christ's sacrifice and His resurrection have destroyed the power of this injustice. Consequently, the futility to which creation has been subjected since the fall is now lifted (Rom. 8:20). Creation is now won back to God and it is incumbent upon us to play our role to treat the environment with respect as God's holy ground and sanctify it through intercession. Thus, this role of intercession and sanctification should never be distant from our consciousness.

The Holy Spirit and Creation in Orthodox Liturgical Prayers

As mentioned earlier, Orthodoxy believes that the hermeneutic of *theoria*, which enables us to interpret and apply God's revelation to today, is a necessary tool in interceding on behalf of the created world. In the same way, the Liturgical prayers of the Church also link up the Holy Spirit with creation. For instance, Psalm 104 is read at every Vespers service, giving us a constant reminder of creation. The link is also made many times in the Orthros or Morning Prayer service before the Eucharistic service. For instance, it says, "Verily, all creation is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and returns to its former being."²⁴⁸ The Holy Spirit has "sovereignty over creation, its sanctification and its motion."²⁴⁹ and "is the Element of life."²⁵⁰ He gives "grace and life"²⁵¹ and waters all

247.Papadeas, Father George, *Greek Orthodox Holy Week & Easter Services: A New English Translation* (Patmos Press, South Daytona, FL, 1997), p.431.

248.S. Nassar, *Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ*, op. cit., p.142.

249.Op. cit. p.149.

250.Ibid.

251.Op. cit. p.157.

"creation with refreshing life."²⁵² He preserves "all creations seen and unseen."²⁵³

Another important liturgical source is the service of Baptism. In the prayer for the blessing of the water, it links creation to the Holy Spirit when it says:

For thou, of thine own good will, hast brought into being all things which before were not, and by thy might, thou upholdest creation, and by thy providence thou orderest the world. For thou ... didst descend upon earth, ...because... thou couldst not endure to behold mankind oppressed by the Devil; ... All creation magnifieth thee, who hast manifested thyself. For thou, O our God, hath revealed thyself upon earth, and dwelt among men. Thou didst hallow the streams of Jordan, sending down upon them from heaven thy Holy Spirit, and didst crush the heads of the dragons who lurked there.²⁵⁴

A little further, it links the element of water to our being created in the image of God:

Thou hast bestowed upon us from on high a new birth through water and the spirit. Wherefore, O Lord, manifest thyself in this water, and grant that *he* who is baptized therein may be transformed ... and renewed after the image of Him who created *him*²⁵⁵

This sense of us being in God's image is a constant theme in our liturgical prayers. All of creation is penetrated by and reflects the trinity. Further, the "Church tries to lead the believer up from the nature around us to the Creator, from the created to the uncreated Holy Trinity"²⁵⁶ because creation is an icon of God himself. Creation comes alive and finds its worth only in relation to God. The unified and Trinitarian mode of the divine life of the Godhead is also reflected in the beauty of creation. For Orthodoxy, God is at once immanent, permeating all things, and at the same time, transcendent. Likewise, the Word of God, when he became flesh, was both God and man at the same time, with two distinct natures. This was expressed clearly in the Council of Chalcedon:

252. Op. cit. p.165.

253. Op. cit. p.173.

254. *Service Book*, op. cit., 1971, p.154.

255. Ibid.

256. Keselopoulos, op. cit., p.21

Two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the differences of natures is in no way suppressed by their union, but rather the properties of each one retained and united in one single person and single hypostases.²⁵⁷

All these mysteries stand together. Thus, in the Eucharist, we consecrate bread and wine where these products of the material world reach into the divine. They do not change their nature as bread and wine but are transformed and when they are offered in a priestly way back to God, who gave them to us, in a sense they stand for all bread and wine and, in fact, for all of creation. Likewise, when the water is blessed for the feast of the baptism of Christ, all waters are blessed. Unless this central aspect of the issue of the environment is sensed, then the heart of the struggle to renew and protect it will be missed.

In similar vein, on the feast of the baptism of Christ, (Mt. 1: 9-11) it links up creation and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of the Great Sanctification of Water:

For thou, by thine own will, from nothingness hast brought all things into being, by thy might thou dost uphold creation, and by thy providence thou dost direct the world. Thou hast fitly framed the creation out of four elements; thou didst crown the circle of the year with four seasons. All the reason-endowed powers tremble before thee. The sun praiseth thee, and the moon glorifieth thee; the stars intercede with thee... Thou didst sanctify the streams of Jordan, in that thou didst send down from heaven thine all-holy Spirit and didst crush the heads of the serpents that lurked there.²⁵⁸

It continues the theme of the renewal of creation through the Holy Spirit further down:

For thou art our God who, through water and the Spirit, hast renewed our nature, grown old through sin. Thou art our God who with water didst drown sin in the days of Noah. Thou art our God who by the sea, through Moses, didst set free from slavery to Pharaoh the Hebrew race. Thou are our God who didst cleave the rock in the wilderness, so that water gushed forth and streams overflowed and didst satisfy thy thirsty people. Thou art our God who by water and fire, through

257. P. L'Huillier, op. cit., p.194

258. *The Liturgikon*, op. cit., pp.448-449

Elias, didst bring Israel back from the deception of Baal.²⁵⁹

Finally, an important hymn in this blessing should be quoted:

When thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to thee, and called thee his beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the likeness of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to thee.²⁶⁰

The other important feast, which links creation to the Holy Spirit in its liturgical prayers, is Pentecost. Thus, we sing:

Blessed art thou, O Christ our God, who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise, having sent upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them thou hast fished the universe, O Lover of mankind, glory to thee.²⁶¹

Likewise, in Matins for Pentecost, it says:

The spring of the Spirit hath come to those on earth, dividing supersensuously into fire-bearing rivers, moistening the Apostles and illuminating them. The fire hath become to them a dew cloud, lighting, and raining flames upon them, from whom we received grace by the fire and the water. Verily, the fire of the Comforter hath come and lighted the world.²⁶²

In the same service, the cosmic dimension of the role which the Blessed Virgin took on, is reflected upon:

O Mother that hath known no man, thou didst conceive, not experiencing corruption, lending a body to the Word, the Creator of all, becoming a receptacle to thine insupportable Creator, a dwelling-place to thine incomprehensible Maker. Wherefore, O virgin Theotokos, thee do we magnify.²⁶³

The Trinitarian connection to creation is also highlighted:

Light is the Father; and Light the Son; Light is the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles in fiery tongues, through which the whole universe was illuminated

259. *The Liturgikon*, op. cit., p. 449

260. *The Liturgikon*, op. cit., pp. 451

261. Nassar, *Divine Prayers & Services*, op. cit., 1000.

262. *Ibid.*

263. Nassar, op. cit., pp. 1000.

to worship the holy Trinity.²⁶⁴

The theme of God's light and creation continues:

O Thou most exalted God, who alone dost possess immortality, who dwellest in the unapproachable light, who in wisdom didst bring into being all creation, who didst separate between the light and the darkness, setting the sun to rule the day, and the moon and the stars to rule the night, who on this day didst vouchsafe to us sinners, to apprehend thy countenance by confession, lifting to thee our evening prayer,²⁶⁵

Conclusion

My approach has thus far been to set the theological groundwork for my parishioners to deepen their understanding of God's creation and our relationship to it.

This includes: an understanding the importance of revelation in the creation of the cosmos and relating this to the sciences relevant to this field; the need to contemplate the beauty of creation and reach into our souls to touch the creator Himself; the need to understand our anthropology with its requirement to embark on an ascetic lifestyle; the urgent need to relate creation to the Eschaton using our priestly role to fulfill this; the need to recognize our ability to reinterpret the scriptures for today through *theoria*; and finally, the need to summarize it all in the Eucharist. Only then can we hope for the Holy Spirit to guide us to properly take on those various projects which we think may help. In regard to what science believes it thinks we need to embark on, such projects need to incorporate the above elements so that we can truly unite the created and the uncreated, the material and the immaterial.

The ensuing project therefore will initially be an educational exercise to understand these factors. Hopefully, this will enable people to use their God given calling to sanctify themselves and so, intercede for and sanctify creation. The next step is to use the project to bring about these goals.

What follows is a description of how this project has unfolded.

264.Nassar, op. cit., p.1003.

265.Nassar, op. cit., pp.1018-1019.

SECTION THREE: THE PROJECT

Thus, the challenge is there for the membership of the parish to move from a pragmatic approach to a deeper understanding of their responsibility to creation. The question may be asked at this point: What act of ministry will result from the engagement of the local committee in the project? Because a major goal of this paper is to develop the Local Committee's understanding of what is an Orthodox approach to this issue, I hope that the act of ministry will be an interactive educational engagement with the local committee. The reason I am choosing to minister in this way is to challenge them about understanding their missionary role as Orthodox Christians in caring for creation. It is my hope from this to give them a deeper identity about themselves and how this affects their relationship to the wider community. The various parts are outlined below.

Thus, the teaching part of the project will cover certain areas that an Orthodox Christian needs to reflect on in order to adequately respond to the issue. These include:

- An introductory discussion about the environment
- An Orthodox understanding of the Trinity
- The Orthodox method of interpreting the Scriptures
- The creation of the world from nothing
- The Fall and what this meant to the material world and us
- An outline of Orthodox anthropology
- The current milieu of secularism and other philosophies showing how they affect our notion of creation
- The Orthodox responses of Repentance, Asceticism, Contemplation and Intercession through the Eucharist to the environment
- An examination of certain liturgical texts and icons showing how these and other aspects of Church life tie into the issue and the rest of the Orthodox Tradition.

Applying Thomas Groome's Educational Method of *Shared Praxis in Praxis to the* Doctoral Project

It would not be realistic in a parish setting to cover every theological detail within these topics. What I want to do instead is develop their consciousness of these topics, hopefully to the depth that it will change their outlook on the environment and give them a deeper understanding of their relationship to God and His creation.

I would like to use the educational method of the five stages of shared *praxis*, which Thomas Groome uses in his book *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. Using Chapter 10²⁶⁶ as a basis, I will formulate questions for each of the topics listed above. I have described it as an "interactive educational engagement" whereby I hope that the Local Committee will engage in an educational process, which will hopefully broaden its horizons on this issue. I Hope that the above-described topics will provide a good general coverage of this issue.

The Sessions:

Session One: Introduction

My aim in Session One will be to provide discussion on the topic in general so that the Local Committee's interest will continue for the sessions to follow. Initially some "ice breakers" will be done, and to make the group feel relaxed, they will be told that they will not be forced to speak if they do not want to. A black board will be used to summarize thoughts that will come from the questions.

Under Groome's heading, *Naming Present Action* (p.208), which he calls the First Movement, the aim is to elicit a personal statement from the participants about the issue of the environment. Thus, these questions would be asked: What do we mean by the

266. Thomas H., Groome, op. cit., pp. 207-232.

term "environment?" (I would list the answers.) What does the environment mean in your life? What does it mean for this group, which has come together? What does it mean for our parish of St. Elias? What does it mean for the Middle East from where most of us come?

In regard to the Second Movement, *Participants Stories and Visions* (p.211), the aim is to enable the participants to become aware of their own stories about the environment. Thus, these questions: Why is our present response to and consciousness of the environment the way it is? In what ways do our actions make a difference to the environment? What would we want to do to promote a better consciousness of the environment at home, in the parish and the Syracuse community? Also, it would be worth getting members to share about times they carelessly polluted the environment and felt guilty about it. This sharing would be initiated by myself.

For the Third Movement, *The Orthodox Community's Story and Vision* (cf. p.214), I would point out that my reflection and reading on this issue is that the Orthodox story has a very clear message. Thus, I see it in its prayers, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, in the monastic love for the created world, and the writings of Orthodox theologians, which have always expressed a love for the beauty of creation. I would then ask: What do you think? I would also give some quotes from the current leaders of the Orthodox Church who have spoken about the environment. I would point out that it is my hope that these sessions will enable them to encounter the Orthodox Church's vision of God's creation and how it affects our relationship with our creator. In other words, how does Orthodoxy's story relate to their experience?

In the Fourth Movement, the *Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Story and the Participants' Stories* (p.217), the aim is to have Orthodoxy's story relate to their own stories. Thus: What does Orthodoxy's experience and writings mean for our personal experience? Where does your experience concur? Where does it differ? How do these

differences challenge us? How can our experience align with the Orthodox one?

In the Fifth Movement, the *Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Vision and the Participants' Visions* (p.220), the aim is to critique these visions in the light of the Kingdom of God. Thus: How do our life experience and hopes line up with our call to be part of God's kingdom? What can we do to bring us closer to God's kingdom now? As mentioned, a black board would be used to clarify this vision.

Session Two: How does God Relate to us?

Session Two will be on grasping an Orthodox understanding of the Trinity. This discussion will center on the question: How does God relate to us? This question therefore, will be the title of the session. It might seem to be a “dry” area to begin with, but it is very important that they grasp what the Orthodox framework of the Trinity is. Even on this topic, there are significant differences of approach with the West.

For Groome’s First Movement, titled *Naming Present Action* (p.208), the initial question would be: How do you experience God relating to the world? How does he relate to nature or through a significant person? These ways would be listed.

In the Second Movement, the questions would be centered on themselves. Thus: How does God relate to you? I will get the group to name some of the areas. For example, while at work or singing in the choir. These answers would be listed. Then the question would be asked: Would anyone like to share when they felt closest to God? Are there times when you pray to one person of the Trinity instead of God? When would you pray to one person of the Trinity rather than another?

The third movement should be broken up into different areas.

- a) Biblical. Think of the movie *The Ten Commandments*. Can you think of other stories from the Bible, which describe these or other images? Can you name or connect some of the images in the Bible to a particular person of the Trinity.

- b) Nature. Do you think nature is beautiful? The Orthodox Church says you can see God in nature. What do you think? Does nature inspire you? National Geographic uses the slogan: “Always wonder.” What do you think about this phrase? Does a sense of wonder bring you closer to God? St. Gregory of Nyssa says we should “marvel at the wonder of this ineffable power.” How might this bring us closer to God?
- c) Energy. What is energy? Name some scientific, sociological, psychological and theological definitions. Is this energy directly from God or, is it a law unto itself? Therefore, are we experiencing God’s energy directly or, as something distinct from Him?
- d) Humanity. The Orthodox Church uses the word “person” to define us. (What is the distinguishing feature of this term?) What do you think the word means? List some of these meanings. How does God’s energy affect us as humans compared to the material world?

It is very important here to bring out the relational quality of the term and this needs to be linked up to the term Trinity. It will be pointed out that we use the term person to describe the Trinity. What does this mean? What are the distinct features of the three persons of the Trinity? Orthodoxy says that the Father is the principle of origin in the Trinity, the Son is the expression of the Father and begotten and the Holy Spirit is the power or energy of God. Can anything else be said about the Trinity? How does it all happen between them? The notion of mystery needs to be discussed here. The Roman Catholic Church²⁶⁷ says that the Son is a principle of origin with the Father, producing the Holy Spirit. What do you think? Why does Orthodoxy differ? What are some implications between the two beliefs? We will list them.

267. For the sake of simplicity, in the discussion sessions, I use the terms Western and Eastern Churches in a more general sense unless otherwise stated as above. Thus, Western means those Churches that grew out of Western Europe and for Eastern, those that grew out of Eastern Europe, Africa or Asia.

e) Summarize all these aspects to clarify the thought.

In the Fourth Movement, the question to ask is: How does your experience of relating to God line up with the factors we have listed? Discuss where your experience relates or does not relate. If you can relate to God as a person, in what ways is He a mystery?

In the Fifth Movement, while relating a person's vision to the Church's, the question needs to be asked: If Orthodoxy says that our need to express ourselves as persons will ultimately be found in the kingdom of God, how does this relate to our hopes of getting into heaven?

Session Three: An Orthodox understanding of the Scriptures.

In the First Movement: What do I mean by the term: The Scriptures? List the answers. What is your favorite story? What do the Scriptures mean for your life? How much impact do they have?

In the Second Movement: If you hear or read a passage of scripture, what techniques do you use to get something helpful from them? Do you pray using the scriptures? How do you decide what are important passages and which are less relevant ones? Would anyone like to share his or her favorite story?

In the Third Movement: Have you heard the term "only scripture" (scripture sola)? What does it mean? Can God speak to you in other ways besides the written Word of God? Name some of these ways. Nature, lives of the saints.... List them. Orthodoxy says that the Bible should not be isolated from these various ways that God can speak to us. What do you think? Western Christians say it should be elevated above all the others. What do you think?

Interpreting the Scriptures:

We have all heard of terrible examples of when people have misinterpreted the

Scriptures to do evil. How does one put a “safety valve” on its interpretation to avoid this? List any suggestions. What safety guards does the Orthodox Church say are needed? (I will point out that the Orthodox Church decided on the canonical scriptures many centuries ago and that for us, it is the Ecumenical Councils, which will be explained, that decide Church doctrine and teaching). What do you think?

What principles should a priest or a scripture scholar use to properly teach and interpret the scriptures? I will use John Breck’s principles here (pp.38ff) with its emphasis on the unique Antiochian method of Typology and *theoria*, which is “the vision of the interpreter rather than that of the prophet” (Breck p. .99). I will explain the two terms and their usage, and will ask, do you believe this is an adequate method?

In the Fourth Movement, Story and Participants: Where does your experience of using and reflecting on the Scriptures agree or differ with the Church’s principles?

Science and the Bible:

Can the Bible relate to the Theory of Evolution? What about Genesis and the Big Bang Theory? What about the question of historical accuracy in the Bible? Did Moses and the Jewish people really walk through the Red Sea and the desert? Did the wall fall down in Jericho when Joshua blew the trumpet? Do these questions matter?

In the Fifth Movement: Orthodoxy says that the word of God should be interpreted for today to enlighten our souls and inspire us through prayer to bring us closer, as persons to God. In other words, this is the food for us on our journey to the Kingdom of God. How do you think the Scriptures will help you to get to heaven? Is it the only vehicle or source of food? If not, name some others.

Session Four: Creation of the World from nothing

In the First Movement: Can science help us to understand how the world came into existence? How can it help? Mathematicians tell us that theoretically, there could be

an infinite number of other universes just like our own. Could this be so? What about black holes? How do you relate God to these mind-boggling questions? Is the question of how the universe came into existence important to you? Do you want scientists to continue searching for alien life species? Do these questions disturb your relationship with God?

In the Second Movement: Do you question whether God even exists given many of these notions? Does your experience and understanding of God help you to understand how the world came into existence? Do you ask God about these questions? How does He relate to the material universe?

In the Third Movement: The Orthodox Church says: God created the world from nothing. What does “from nothing” mean? Is it the explosion of energy from a teaspoon of primordial matter, as the Big Bang theorists suppose? The Orthodox Church says that God is beyond the scientific laws of the material universe. How is God, therefore, related to matter? How do we avoid the problem that matter is somehow on the same plane as God if it was there from the beginning? After all, the question has been asked: If God made the world, then who made God? Is He like a watchmaker? Orthodoxy says that God is nothing or, “no-thing.” How does this make sense? It also says that God is at the same time both transcendent and immanent. Can this be explained? If we believe in it, does it solve the above questions? If so, how?

In the Fourth Movement: Does your understanding of God and creation fit in with the above questions? How does the creation story of Genesis line up with your understanding of God? Is it incompatible with science? Was the world created in seven days? Should it be interpreted in this way? If not, then in what way?

In the Fifth Movement: What is your worldview of the universe? How do you feel about the Orthodox assertion that God is both immanent and transcendent? Does it make you feel closer to God or more distant from God? What is your response to the

prospect that although, in the scheme of things, we are minuscule specks in a cosmic ocean, yet we seem to be able to personally relate to its very creator? Would you like to share your response with the group? The session would conclude with a reading of Psalm 104.

Session Five: Genesis and the Fall

In the First Movement: What in your day-to-day life, is important to you about this story? Does it mean anything? List what it does mean.

In the Second Movement: Do you believe the Genesis story? If not all, then what parts? Do you believe we had two first parents? Society will often say that we are evolved primates and that Adam and Eve could not have existed. What do you think? Some scientists believe that the first humans evolved in Africa. Does it matter whether this is true or not? Personal Stories: What do you get out of this story. List what people say.

In the Third Movement: It may be necessary at this point to give a presentation of the Orthodox view of the Fall and its implications. I prefer to get a response from the group about whether they prefer to examine this topic by discussion sessions or by giving a presentation with a few reflective questions. What follows is in line with Thomas Groome's method.

Before the Fall:

Orthodoxy says that Adam and Eve were more spiritual than flesh. What do you think this means? God made them in His image and likeness. Orthodoxy says that their image was a reflection of the personhood and beauty of God, the likeness is reflected in their ability to seek goodness. Do we still have these traits today? To what extent? God was on very close talking terms with them. Does this make sense? If so, what does that imply for us? What responsibilities did God give them? Do we have these

responsibilities today? What are they? (These are very important questions). To till the earth; care for the earth and report to God about it; be stewards of the world (the Greek word is cosmos); have dominion or be custodians over it. Flesh out the meanings here. Patriarch Ignatius says that we are a microcosm; we are the interface between the material and the immaterial, the spiritual and the carnal. What does this mean? Do we truly have a cosmic role in this vast physical universe? What does God want us to do with this role?

The Fall:

What exactly did they eat? Which tree? What did gaining knowledge of good and evil mean? What did they experience? What happened to their bodies at this point? What did God do to them? Why were they driven out of the garden? Was God just being mean? What would have happened if they ate of the Tree of Life? How would that have affected them and us?

After the Fall:

Orthodox Tradition says their bodies became denser. What do you think this means? What implications did this have? What happened to their image and likeness of God after the fall? Do we still reflect God's beauty? Are we still capable of seeking goodness? In what ways are these aspects dimmed? Orthodoxy says that we did not inherit the guilt of Adam but we did inherit his fallen state. How does this differ from the Roman Catholic view?

Recall the story of Cain and Abel. Why was there a need to make sacrifice? What psychological factors were affecting Cain? How does the sin of greed affect the earth today? How was their gift of personhood affected? How was their relationship to the earth affected and therefore God's cosmic plan for humanity? If we were not meant to be alienated individuals, how do we rectify this unity in our Fallen state?

In the Fourth Movement: Do you see your role as an Orthodox Christian as a

cosmic one? Have the above questions helped to shed light on this? Can you see where greed in your own life has affected the earth? Can you see any points of agreement between science and Genesis?

In the Fifth Movement: When you will have to account for your good works at the Last Judgment, have you thought about the aspect of being a steward of creation as well as to your fellow humans? What is your hope for your children (or grandchildren) regarding this planet in the future? Most sincere Christians often think of how they have failed their fellow humans. Many books have been written to help us be genuine when reflecting about this. In what ways have you failed to live out this cosmic role by indifference, pollution or greed? Are you prepared to turn back to God and repent of this?

Session Six: An Orthodox Anthropology

The word anthropology means the study of man. Specifically, it refers to our make up.

In the First Movement: Apart from our biological functions, try to name other aspects of our selves. These will be listed.

In the Second Movement: Science has helped to clarify the biological functions of our bodies. In what ways do other aspects of our make up affect us? Give some examples. These will be listed and linked to the First Movement.

In the Third Movement: The Orthodox Church says that our intellect is made up of our imagination, memory and reason. Do you agree or disagree? How can these traits be used for good or bad? In regard to the body, the Orthodox Church says that our appetites are good because God created them. Do you agree or disagree? If it is true, in what ways do our bodies go wrong? Give examples. If not, what do you think? Romans 7:14-25 will be quoted and then I will ask to try to compare this passage to the Fall of

Adam and Eve. Orthodoxy calls the fallen part of us the passions. Some examples will be asked for. How do they relate to the passions? In verse 23, St. Paul uses the term “battle” to describe their interaction. Would you describe it as a battle that is going on inside us? For example, the issue of weight loss in our society. Orthodoxy says that this battle goes on in our hearts where either the passions of the body will take control or the intellect will. It also says that we need to cooperate (synergy) with God to win. Do we need God’s help in this battle? Can we win it on our own? What role does our will play here? Is it enough to just use will power? It is said that Adam and Eve committed the sin of pride at The Fall. What does this mean? How does pride affect us? Orthodoxy also says that if our intellect wins this battle, our souls will become free to listen to God by hearing His Word. How do you think this may be the case? What happens to the soul if the intellect loses this battle?

In the Fourth Movement: Give examples of either yourself or others who have had to fight such battles. How can our studies help our intellects in the way we have discussed above? How can we discern which intellectual disciplines may be good for us and which may not be? How helpful is prayer in this? Patriarch Bartholomew says that the cooperation between science and religion will produce healthful energies. Is this true? Think about areas in yourself that you cannot control. Have you really asked for God’s help in this? Where does your pride come into it?

In the Fifth Movement: How does God want us to control these passions in preparation for our entry into his Kingdom? Will a victory within us in this battle have any impact on the planet? In what ways? Has this analysis of our make up helped to clarify what we need to do to cooperate with God? In what ways?

Session Seven: Secularism

In the First Movement: What is secularism? Is it good, bad or neutral? Have you

thought about what secularism is? Does it bother you?

In the Second Movement: Can you give examples of how secularism impacts us today? How does it impact the Church and society? How does it impact the Church calendar? Can you think of any national ethical decisions impacted by secularism which conflict with Church teaching?

In the Third Movement: The Orthodox Church says that the biggest problem with secularism is the separation of the divine world from the material. What do you think this means? Secularism says that sacred space should be kept within closed quarters. For example, within a church building. It also advocates that sacred events should not be celebrated in public places, like prayer and church festivals in public schools. What do you think about this? Would you like to pray as a Christian in public places? Orthodoxy believes that Western Christendom (especially the Roman Church) caused this development by removing the urgency of the Kingdom of God from our daily lives. For instance, the Our Father says: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Do you feel that the Kingdom of God is close to you in your daily lives? Name some of the ways that this may be so. Are these private thoughts or public proclamations? It also says that, in contrast, the sacred and the profane should always be linked. Give some examples of this in our church building and worship. Should we be doing this outside of the church? What about the use of bells in the church? What do you think about those who bless themselves in restaurants at grace before meals?

In the Fourth Movement: Is the sacred in your life a private or public thing? In Orthodoxy, we bless everything a lot, even lakes and seas. Do you think this is good? Have you ever wished to make a public proclamation about something sacred in your life? Do you regard your work or study as being sacred? Is the earth sacred? Is your family sacred? Is it appropriate to proclaim such things? Where do you think we need to draw the line about public proclamations?

In the Fifth Movement: Orthodoxy believes that the phrase “Thy Kingdom come” is central to the living of our daily lives. Do you think this is realistic? Do you see your wish to be in heaven one day as being important in your day-to-day life? Does it connect to your work and play and your relationship with others? What is your personal hope for achieving the goal to get to heaven? What role does the earth play in these things?

Session Eight: Orthodox Responses to the Issue

Repentance:

In the First Movement: Do the issues of pollution, usage of natural resources and energy output concern you and in what ways? Does the apparent outlook for the planet make you feel sad, indifferent or joyful? What can you see about the planet that needs repenting about? What does repentance mean for you?

In the Second Movement: What do you think needs to change in your attitude toward creation and the planet to redirect its well being in the right way?

In the Third Movement: Jesus said: “If you love me, keep my commandments and I will pray to the Father and He will send to you the Comforter.” (John 14:15-16) How have we broken his commandments in regard to the planet and creation? Patriarch Bartholomew says that humanity needs the gift of tears of repentance to avert a global ecological catastrophe. What do you think about this? Some presentation of the Eucharistic Sacrifice may be necessary here.

In the Fourth Movement: What does “tears of repentance” mean? Do you know of important people in the Church who have this gift? What special qualities have such people brought to the Church and creation?

In the Fifth Movement: Does God require us to have this gift to get to heaven? Are there other similar gifts that we may acquire? In what ways can we show our love for God by loving His creation?

Asceticism:

In the First Movement: What does the word mean? What role do you think this should play in a person's life and for society in general?

In the Second Movement: Give some examples where you practice this in your life? Are these practices important to you? Do you fast or know of others who fast? What about vegetarians? What does fasting mean to you? What about dieting?

In the Third Movement: The Orthodox Church says fasting should be a part of your life style. What do you think? Is it compatible with current work practices and modern day life? The Gospels say that there should not be a large discrepancy between rich and poor. Do you always seek to buy the most expensive item? Does consumerism have limits?

In the Fourth Movement: Do you think fasting can help you? Have you ever considered ways to reduce your household energy output? For instance, by buying a smaller car or foregoing that ski jet? Do we need to have air-conditioned homes? How can we improve the energy output of this church building?

In the Fifth Movement: Have modern amenities made us lose touch with the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves? The city of Syracuse cuts down a large, mature spruce tree each Christmas. What do you think about this practice? Does it really relate to the birth of Christ? Is it necessary? Does your family do this for Christmas? What about this church building? Can it conserve energy better? There is a local group in Syracuse who studies buildings in regard to this. Would you be interested in having them over to inspect the building and get advice?

Contemplation:

In the First Movement: What do you think about the claim that nature is

beautiful?

In the Second Movement: Would you like to share an experience about a nature excursion you enjoyed? What was the best part of it? Are there any other similar experiences that you would like to relate?

In the Third Movement: The monastic tradition is a central part of Orthodox life. Do you think it is compatible with American culture? The Church says there are various types of prayer. What is contemplative prayer? Are you capable of it? The Church Fathers say there are various stages in contemplation. Can you name any of them? What would be the first stage? Can you give examples of some saints who have talked about this type of prayer? Did anything strike you about what was said by them?

In the Fourth Movement: Can you think of any experiences in prayer, which you have had, which seem to link up with any of the forms of Orthodox prayer or liturgical life?

In the Fifth Movement: What role does prayer have in getting us to heaven? Does society need to pray?

Session Nine: Liturgical Texts:

In the First Movement: What does the word Liturgy mean? How does it relate to you? What connections are there between the Liturgy and creation?

In the Second Movement: Does your experience of nature relate to or connect with the Liturgy? In what ways?

In the Third Movement: A sheet will be given to them, which will give some Orthodox liturgical references on creation. I will ask them to read them and highlight the ones that strike a chord.

In the Fourth Movement: Would you like to make some suggestions about how we could best use them to express what is in our hearts in regard to this?

In the Fifth Movement: What would you like to see happen at the liturgical level to help to establish the connection between the texts and creation? Would any of you like to speak to the parish at the liturgical setting about how these sessions have enabled you to grasp these topics at a deeper level?

Final Session

At some point when the weather is warmer, I want to do a nature excursion to gain a group experience about creation. One short talk I would give is a biblical theology on trees. This would be done as a preamble. At lunch, we would have a discussion about which topics were the most helpful and try to tie up the various topics. In the afternoon, some quiet time would be given to reflect on everything. A Vespers service would be held at the site to conclude the day.

Some General Comments

After each discussion session, a written summary of the theology of each topic would be given out for the committee members to take home and hopefully read and reflect on. Folders will be provided for them to keep these notes and any they may wish to choose. All the above questions would be given to them at the beginning of each session for the relevant topic. I also intend to write up a report after each session of my perception of the dynamics and comments from the group and the individuals. After all the sessions, a questionnaire will be given to them to write up what they felt about them and what they got from them. Outlined below is a list of objectives I wrote in my proposal colloquium. Their feedback will be evaluated against these objectives. Finally, each of the committee will be interviewed to give a personal evaluation. They will be encouraged to be honest and suggest ways that the sessions could be improved.

At the application level, some of the local important environmental issues will be examined, both in regard to the church site and the Syracuse community, to see what projects may be developed by the parish. For instance, many things could still be done to improve the building to conserve energy. Also, the Environmental Protection Agency has a Web Site which gives guidelines for Churches to help them conserve energy and this will be studied in order to make practical recommendations. A local community group on Global Warming and Light Pollution formed last year and I have invited them to examine our building to suggest improvements. I have also asked them to look at the possibility of putting windmills on top of the church since our site is on a hill. Whatever the results, I will be inviting the local newspaper to report on the project as a model for other churches. As Orthodox, it is vital that such projects would be included as part of the parish's liturgical life because an Orthodox Christian's faith must be lived.

The Local Committee

The head of the Local Committee is a person named Ramzy Makhlof. He is twenty-five years old, single and an engineer by profession. He is a very active and dedicated member of the parish. When I discussed the doctoral project with him he was very enthusiastic about it. We have decided to make the core of the Local Committee from younger people who have graduated from College since we have quite a number of them in the parish. At the same time, older interested members of the parish will be included. We believe that by taking this approach, we can reach the desired number of 15 to 20 people. We are also confident that this approach will have an impact on the parish as a whole. A letter is to be sent out, followed up by phone calls to these people. I have discussed the project with some people and have had a favorable response about joining the committee.

It should be pointed out that the scope of this project will only be to directly

engage the local committee. Opportunities will be given for them to give or write testimonials to the whole parish about their experience of the project but a systematic approach on this topic, together with its evaluation will be confined to the local committee.

An important dynamic worth mentioning is that this is a very closely-knit parish since most of the parishioners are related to each other. Thus, news of even the smallest development travels through the parish circles very quickly. I am sure any development of thought within the local committee will quickly have an impact on the rest of the parish.

As well as this, the hierarchy of our Archdiocese has requested that its parishes form such groups into ministry teams. It also wants education to be central in the formation. Thus, I see this development as an inevitable progression from the doctoral project. Such ministry teams have been given the title, St. John the Divine, and although not intended to be involved in the material administration of the parish, it plays a direct role in forming the direction of the diocesan regions and the diocese as a whole by being required to organize and attend the regional and national archdiocesan conferences and conventions. In this sense, it will have a great impact on our local parish as well.

I have already talked to the head of the local committee who is keen to have the younger members of the committee form into a pastoral ministry group and that each year we would focus on an area of importance in the same way. I regard this as very important because these people will be the parish's future leaders.

Objectives

The question may be asked as to what change this input of knowledge might bring to those learning about it? The first objective will be for them to recapture the sense of urgency that this issue should have because of its innate connection to the Eschaton, by showing them how it has been lost in history through the milieu of Western theological

distinctions and philosophies. In light of this, the second objective will be to give them a realization of their pivotal priestly role of intercession on behalf of creation so that it can be sanctified. This has to be discussed and explored to the point where I am convinced that they have grasped this along with its ramifications.

The third will be to move them from this resultant deeper theological understanding to seeing how they can live this in their daily lives and our liturgical setting. The three-fold spiritual exercises of repentance for the fall of creation, the decision to be ascetic or conserve our resources and reflection on the beauty of creation and the mystery of God will be used to hopefully create a response. This will happen on a one-to-one basis and with the whole group, to reflect and explore how these things can be done on a daily basis. As with many parishes, our people usually know what to do as Orthodox but they have little or no understanding of the thinking behind the liturgical practices and devotions. Thus, it is important to have them connect this issue to the significant points in the Liturgical Calendar, including those feasts that reflect upon Creation such as the Theophany, Transfiguration and Dormition. These liturgical services use the natural elements of water, wine, oil, flowers, fruits and herbs in the celebrations. Also, a certain feast would be chosen by the committee to liturgically celebrate this project and the ensuing decisions, which come from the project. At the Ecumenical Patriarch's request, September 1st, the beginning of the Liturgical Cycle, would be celebrated as the Feast Day of Creation with renewed significance.

The fourth objective will be to decide on projects within and outside the of church site. The aim will be to find practical ways to conserve energy and prevent pollution. Part of this will include guidelines about how parishioners can improve their life styles and make the right choices with the environment in mind. Apart from the newspapers, I will put together my own report that will hopefully be a model for other parishes. The fifth objective will be to communicate the results of the study and project to the parish.

Thus, some members of the project committee will be asked to speak at the end of a church service on how this project has helped them to grow in the understanding of their faith and in what way it has changed them.

Evaluation

At some point in the future, ways could be developed to assess the impact that this project would have on the committee. A number of questions need to be asked. For instance, in what ways have they specifically contributed to the worsening of this issue in the past? Did the project help them to see the need for a call to repentance for what is happening to our planet? In what ways has Secularism affected their worldview? How does Orthodoxy contrast to this? What do they see as a uniquely Orthodox approach? In what ways has this approach changed their attitude to the environment? Also, how do the Orthodox ascetic practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving relate to the need to conserve ecologically? Can they see how this issue relates to our liturgical life as well as its blessings? Also, to the layout and iconography of an Orthodox Church? How does this relate to the beauty of this planet and the Cosmos in general? Has it changed their view of them?

The research method to be used and the one which seems to be best suited to this project will be that of the Pro-Active method as described by William R. Myers on page 29 of his book, *Research in Ministry*, in which I will be "passionately involved with the practice being evaluated." I would also like to write up reports for each of the sessions after we have met.

Their response will be on going and I will request a more formal response from

them either by interview or written comments to evaluate whether their pragmatic view of creation has changed or to what extent. In other words, to what extent was the project able to challenge and change them?

SECTION FOUR: REPORT & EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Session One: Introduction, January 11, 2003

Coffee and bagels were available for the group. The introductions were comparatively relaxed since most people were acquainted with each other. Thirteen people came and composed a nice cross section of the parish. They ranged in age from 18 to 82.

The head of the Local Committee devised a quiz competition of biblical questions that were related to creation. The committee was broken into four groups and competed with each other in answering about twenty questions. It was a lot of fun and a very effective “ice breaker”. It has been included as an appendix to this report since I believe it could be of value to others who may want to use this project.

The session was due to begin at 10:00 a.m. By the time everyone arrived, however, had his or her coffee and bagels and did the “ice breaker”, it was 11:00 a.m.

We then commenced the session according to the questions listed in the Proposal Colloquium. For the first question, “What do we mean by the term ‘environment’?” various answers were given such as: Everything around us; ourselves and that we are

temples of the Holy Spirit; the effect of our living conditions and how we react to everything around us; what God and humanity have created. These were listed.

The next question, “What does the environment mean in your life?” created a lot of discussion. Aside from the definition outlined above, it was recognized that there were different kinds of environments: ergonomic, psychological, physical and that the quality of these have a definite impact on us. It was interesting that it was seen in terms of what does the environment do to me rather than the other way around.

With the next question of “What does it mean for this group?” reflection ensued in regard to how the relationship between each of us would change our outlook on this issue and then collectively what impact we would have on this parish. It was pointed out that one of the aims of this project was to have a positive pastoral effect on the parish. I was surprised to hear a couple of people say that they had never experienced the Orthodox Church taking a creative initiative such as this before. They saw the Orthodox Church as very rigid and regressive. I responded by alluding to the history of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in recent centuries where it was decimated by Turkish and Muslim oppression, which stripped it of its resources.

Regarding the question, “What does it mean for our parish of St. Elias?” the discussion quickly developed into a recognition that, because this was something new for the parish, this group could have a very positive influence. The discussion became enthusiastic as a result. I responded by saying that towards the conclusion of the project, we would explore practical initiatives within and outside the parish but that this was beyond our focus for today. One person said that he thought this project was primarily about organizing programs for the grounds of the church but I pointed out that

understanding the theological principles behind this issue are fundamental to taking proper steps. I will be concerned to know whether he will remain committed to the group for the following sessions.

The next question, “What does it mean for the Middle East from where most of us come from?” became the equivalent of dropping a large rock into a still pond! The discussion became very animated with much finger pointing about how much one’s perceived enemies were destroying the environment. One person did ask: “Should this group become political?” I responded that there were groups promoting this issue on that level and that it would be up to this group if they wanted to pursue that direction. A lot of discussion continued about what the Israelis are doing on the West Bank since most of them are of Palestinian background. I pointed out that Orthodox ecology is based on Jewish ecology and that it would be helpful to find points of contact with them on this issue. For instance, no seriously devoted person of Jewish faith could ignore God’s call to bless and protect the earth, which he created.

The next question, under Thomas Groome’s heading, *Participants Stories and Visions*, was “What would we do to promote a better consciousness of the environment in the home, in the parish and the wider Syracuse community?” A number of practical ideas were aired for the home, parish building and the community of Syracuse. My aim here was to be thought provoking but without dwelling too much on it at this stage. The group responded well to the request about sharing times when they carelessly polluted the environment and felt guilty about it. It was recognized that there was less awareness of this issue in times past. One elderly person claimed that he was never conscious of abusing or polluting the environment. I did not challenge him any further. I pointed out

to everyone that a central call of the Orthodox Church was to be repentant for our sins in this area.

Time was running out, so I moved to Groome's fifth movement to critique the group's visions in the light of the Kingdom of God. The question was asked: "How do our life experience and hopes live up to our call to be part of God's kingdom?" The initial response was that we often say the prayer of the Our Father and that this is always a reminder that what we are doing at each moment must lead to the call of "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." Discussion then followed that, having reflected on the earth and the environment, our wish to live out the calling of this prayer must line up with a respect for the earth. This connection between the environment and the kingdom of God was something new for some of them but enthusiastically endorsed by all.

The discussion ended with a very positive response from each of the members and they said they looked forward to the next session.

Session 2: How Does God Relate to us, January 17, 2003

Of all the sessions, this is the one I faced with the most trepidation because of the difficulty of understanding the Trinity. The morning also turned out to be the very cold (-6 degrees F.) and was preceded by a heavy snowfall the night before. The group was much quieter than the previous week.

In the First Movement, *Naming Present Action*, the group gave various responses to the first question of "How do you experience God relating to the world?" such as through work, the beauty of nature, a significant person such as a parent or a saint who

could be looked on as a role model or, through members of their family. Then, with the next question, How does he relate to nature or a significant person? Some of the group elaborated on their devotions to the saints and what this meant to them.

In the Second Movement, the group struggled over the question, Would anyone like to share when they felt closest to God? One person talked about nature. Another talked about when they serve on the altar and help in liturgical services. One engaged couple mentioned their relationship. Finding God in hardship and the death of a loved one was also mentioned. I responded to this last point, saying that this was a very frequent response. I felt that this question was challenging and thought provoking for the group.

I then asked the next question of “Are there times when you pray to one person of the Trinity instead of God?” Responses again came slowly and one person mentioned that she prayed to the Father, alluding to the prayer, the Our Father. Most said, “Well, we just pray to God.” I mentioned that most Western Christians pray to Jesus or Christ and that developing a personal relationship to Christ was very important to them. Even so, the point of the question was to evoke a distinction between the persons of the Trinity and the Godhead.

In the Third Movement, under section “a”, Biblical, I used the movie, *The Ten Commandments*, to help them to come forward with biblical images. These included fire, cloud and wind, which were connected to the Holy Spirit. The priestly image of Aaron, with the cloud was mentioned. Likewise, that of God and Moses’ anger at the Jewish people for their idolatry. Some connected the rock and water with Jesus and his baptism.

They also came up with a number of responses when we discussed section “b”,

Nature. As we reflected on the phrase “Always Wonder” from the logo of the National Geographic Society, a number of people could recognize how this wonder could inspire an awe of God. At the same time, someone made the point that wonder could also bring questioning and doubt. I then quoted St. Gregory of Nyssa, who said we should “marvel at the wonder of his ineffable power.” I then referred to the section in Chapter One of my dissertation (I will give the page number in the final draft) where I outline his description of how we get closer to God by beginning with nature. In this outline, I used St. Gregory’s word of “darkness” for when we are face to face with God but a number of people said they prefer a term like a “leap into the unknown” instead. What was important to me was that they grasped the concepts, which St. Gregory uses, and I think they did.

In section “c”, Energy, we firstly defined the term. Such words as power, movement, motivation, and the movement of molecules or, even the word “thought” were used. In regard to the question, “Is this energy directly from God or, is it a law unto itself?” most initially said it was the latter. I then outlined the Orthodox distinction between the inner workings of the Trinity and God’s outward manifestations or energies. I drew a diagram to explain this. (This consisted of a triangle with the Father at the top and the Son and the Holy Spirit at the bottom and a circle around the triangle with arrows outside the circle pointing outward to signify the energies going forth from the Trinity). I also talked about the developments in the Roman Catholic Church, which created the idea that Sanctifying Grace was a medium between God and humanity. When I asked the group about their experience of God’s grace, they all said they had experienced that it directly from him and not as a medium. I then talked about the gas kitchen stove adjacent

to us in the parish hall and asked the question of whether the energy from it was directly from God or not. A consensus developed that both answers were true but in different senses. While this energy came from natural gas reserves, there was still a sense in which God is directly the source of all the energy of the universe and therefore of the natural gas reserves as well.

In the section “d”, Humanity, I decided to play a more active role in explaining it. I began by asking what they meant by the term “person.” Common notions such as an individual, someone who could reason as compared to animals or someone who had feelings and emotions were given. When asked what was the distinguishing feature of the term, one person used the word “identity.” I used this to highlight the relational aspect of the term and pointed out that we were not created to be like islands as if we relate to no one. Thus, our need for relationships is fundamental. With the question, How does God’s energy affect us as humans as compared to the material world? they talked about God’s love and wisdom giving us the ability to choose goodness instead of evil. The material world cannot do this.

It was from this that I returned to the diagram about the Trinity and talked about the distinguishing features in their relationships. Thus, the Father is un-begotten, the Son is begotten by the Father and the Holy Spirit is begotten by the Father and proceeds through the Son. At the same time, they are all eternal and equal. I said that this is all that one can say about the three persons because their inner workings are a mystery. I was surprised to hear that everyone understood what I was saying at that point! I then went on to discuss how the Church of Rome developed its notion that the Son was also a principle of origin with the Father in begetting the Holy Spirit. I said that for Orthodoxy,

this is a contradiction in terms and by using this argument to establish the divinity of the Holy Spirit, they reinforced their notion that God's presence cannot be experienced directly by humans. This is why they invented the notion that Sanctifying Grace is created.

Time was running out and we were not able to properly develop the Fourth and Fifth Movements. We did touch on the point in the Fifth Movement of connecting our understanding as persons with our hopes of getting to heaven. The moral and ethical implications of our Christian way of life were mentioned and I posed the question of how this relates to the earth that God created. We did not discuss these issues for long, however.

Session Three: An Orthodox Understanding of the Scriptures, January 26, 2003

Before beginning, I wanted to get some feedback from the group about the previous session. I was pleasantly surprised to hear from all of them that they enjoyed it very much. Even though the material was solid, it was comprehensible and thought provoking. We then began this session. The weather was cold but not as bad as the previous week and the group seemed to be more articulate.

We began the First Movement by defining the term, Scriptures. Answers such as God's Word, food for the souls, rules for life, guidance, inspiration and continuity with the past were given. Most said that the Scriptures meant a lot and had a strong impact on their lives. One person did say he only thought about them when he heard them in the Sunday Divine Liturgy.

In the Second Movement, some of the techniques mentioned for reading the

Scriptures were through bible study, using it to focus on particular passages and then thinking, reflecting, connecting and sharing aspects of these passages. A number of them said they would really like to continue this group as a bible study after the doctoral project was completed. I was very pleased to hear this. When I asked if anyone ever prayed while reading the Scriptures, only one person responded. Perhaps this is a technique I will teach in the future. Concerning the question: How do you decide which are important passages and which are less important? Their response was that they preferred the word “relevant” to important since this was the determining factor as to which passages they emphasized more. A couple of them shared the stories they liked the most.

In the Third Movement, none of them had ever heard the term “only scripture” or “scripture sola” and I had to explain to them that this was a big issue for Protestants. I also explained how the issue developed in Europe. On the other hand, when I asked if God can speak to us in other ways besides the written Word of God, they responded with numerous answers: through nature, family members, the lives of the saints, icons and the liturgical services. Some even questioned how God could not speak to us through other means beside the written Word of God. When I asked them whether the bible should be isolated from these other ways, the group looked at me with blank stares and then one person asked: “Why would you?” When I mentioned that Western Christians say it should be elevated above all the others and asked them what they thought, a vigorous discussion arose about the relationship of the bible to the other ways that God shows himself to us. It became so vigorous and argumentative that I decided it was necessary to step in and at least describe the Orthodox approach.

I therefore used John Breck's approach (pp. 38ff. of his book, *Scripture in Tradition*) to outline the Orthodox hermeneutic principles. I listed the following eight principles of Breck on a board.

- 1) The Word of God – Logos – person.
- 2) Trinitarian: from the Father, through the Son; and becomes intelligible in the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Theandric: Divine / Human.
- 4) The Church as the locus for interpretation especially for Scripture scholars.
- 5) Scripture and Tradition: Are interpreted and transmitted in written form. (Cf. 1 Cor. 15: 1-11)
- 6) Typology: the mutual witness of the Old and New Testaments. For example: 1 Cor. 10.
- 7) *Theoria*: we must go from the literal to the fuller sense. This method requires prayer and is the fruit of the Spirit. Examples: Mt. 22:41-46; Rev. 12; Rudolph Guiliani's comments six months after the September 11, 2001 attack.
- 8) Ascetic effort required.

After I gave the outline some asked questions of clarification but I was astonished to hear how the group said that it made a lot of sense and that they believed most of it already. I could not imagine a similar response from a group raised in a Western culture. I mentioned this to them.

I then moved to the question about how does one put a safety valve on the interpretation of scripture. They again came up with informative answers. For example: the traditions of the Church, scripture scholarship, by being Christ centered, the authority

of the Church, our own faith and by connecting the Old and New Testaments.

As mentioned in the listed questions, I talked about the importance of the Ecumenical Councils for the Orthodox Church in deciding the canonical scriptures. We also talked about what the word Canonical meant and what were the canonical books of the bible for the Orthodox Church.

Even though I had mentioned them when I outlined John Breck's hermeneutic principles, I dwelt on the two Antiochian methods of Typology and *theoria* for a short while. I used a couple of examples of Typology from the bible and some members of the group added a couple more. I then went on to explain how *theoria* is supposed to work.

With regard to the Fourth Movement, I was surprised to hear from them that they fundamentally agreed with the Orthodox principles. When I raised the issues of the Theory of Evolution, the Big Bang Theory and historical accuracy of the bible, they naturally created a lot of discussion. Unfortunately, time was running out and they were vigorously discussed after the session ended.

In the Fifth Movement, which asked whether the scriptures helped them to get to heaven, there was a range of answers: from being most important to that of minor importance. Those in the former category were very vocal about what they felt.

Like Session Two, this one covered a lot of ground but the participants seemed to be able to absorb it with little problem as we went along. Some were more vocal than others but when I asked the quieter ones how they felt about it afterwards, they said they enjoyed it very much. Again, the whole group seemed to get a lot from it.

Session Four: The Creation of the World from Nothing, February 1, 2003

I gave copies of the questions for this session to the group at the beginning to help

them follow the line of thought. I also mentioned that I did not want to dwell on the introductory questions for long.

Everyone agreed that science can help us understand how the world came into existence but they also recognized that science has its limits. Some did not understand the statement about the possibility of an infinite number of universes and I had to explain to most of them what a black hole was. The idea of gravity being able to withhold light was a bit hard for some to grasp. When asked how do we grapple with such mind-boggling questions, one elderly person mentioned that there were many unexplainable issues in life and that he just accepted them and got on with his day-to-day living. Another person said that he generally does not have time to think about such things even though he was aware of such discussions.

We also had some discussion about alien life research with varying opinions but everybody said that such questions did not disturb their relationship with God. They simply saw faith as being on a different plane.

In the Second Movement, the last question of how God relates to the material universe evoked the most response. A number of them said that they think about this rather than the beginning of creation. Some scriptural images were mentioned, such as the glory of God's light, our ability to listen to God and that he sustains and keeps the universe in order. Some also mentioned that God gave us a creative spirit and so, we have a unique position in the universe.

In the Third Movement, after explaining the Big Bang Theory, most could see it as a way to explain God's creation because it related to the idea of God as energy. The elderly person mentioned above again said he just accepts that God created the universe

without further explanation.

The following questions:

Is God, therefore, something who is related to matter?

If God made the world, then who made God?

Is he like a watchmaker?

together with their connecting statements about God being beyond scientific laws as well as him not being on the same plane as created matter were very puzzling to the group.

I firstly explained the Orthodox claim about God being beyond scientific laws by saying that the revelation of the one God in three persons in the scriptures and Church teachings makes no sense mathematically. I also explained the historical context of the other two questions together with the Western desire to prove the existence of God. I then talked about the Orthodox idea that God is “no-thing” and described how this was different from the Roman (and subsequently Western) development where creation was seen as being juxtaposed with God from the beginning, creating the danger of dualism. I also talked about the threat of Pantheism, which concerned Rome and sparked this development. I then explained the Orthodox concept of God being immanent and transcendent at the same time. This was something they found easier to relate to.

When I moved onto the Fourth Movement, discussing how our understanding of God fitted in with the above questions, the same elderly person claimed that 90% of people do not care about the above questions. This caused considerable discussion with the rest of the group. The majority said they do matter to most people at least some of the time during their life and when one takes this into account, probably the opposite figure of 10% of most people do not care, is more the case. Finally, the group came to a consensus that 40% of people do not care about such questions much of the time. The

other questions in the Fourth Movement sparked off a lot of discussion but time was running out and I moved through them fairly quickly.

In the Fifth Movement, the group felt that the Orthodox distinction between the immanence and transcendence of God helped to put such questions as the immensity of the universe into perspective. Also, our ability to personally relate to our creator was very important to them.

We concluded by reading Psalm 104.

Session Five: Genesis and The Fall, February 8, 2003

This session was held after lunch on the same day as Session Four. Nine people besides myself were able to stay for this one. In retrospect, I would have preferred to do this session in the morning with the larger group because a reflection of the story of Genesis is very important in understanding our role in the created world. This is not to say that the previous session was not successful. One of the joys of this project is that I am amazed at how well this group has been able to grasp some of the deeper concepts of Orthodox theology and Session Four was no exception. The difference between the two is that Session Four is more conceptual but Five is more applicable to life. In any case, several of the group have said that they would like to re-discuss at least parts of the session they have done before or, may have missed. I am pleased that they want to continue beyond the Doctoral Project.

In the First Movement, when asked how the story of Genesis is important to them in their lives, they said that it is a model for us to live by and that it is a reminder for us to be obedient to God and acknowledge him. It also reminds us of God's creative power

which we share in because we are in his image.

They all said they believed the Genesis story and that scientific theories and ideas should fit into it and not the other way around. Some discussion developed about the Theory of Evolution but everyone recognized it as being imperfect. At the same time, no one believed that each of the seven days mentioned in the creation narrative was literally a twenty-four hour day. When asked about what they got out of the story for themselves, an elderly person asked: Why did God put Adam and Eve through it and why did he punish them? Others replied that it was a matter for them to either obey or disobey God and that this is a major theme in the scriptures. Likewise, that they did not know the difference between good and evil at that point so they were not faced with any complexities to confuse them. It was noted that the tree was not an apple tree and that God drove them out of the Garden of Eden for their own good. One person even posed that perhaps this was a blessing in disguise because, as a result, Christ came on earth. Another person mentioned that we have the same temptations today and that Genesis helps us to respond in the right way.

In the prepared questions for the Third Movement, I mention that I may have to present an Orthodox understanding of the fall instead of using the questions themselves. I am happy to state that the question format worked well in this session.

When I asked what they thought about the Orthodox claim that before the fall, Adam and Eve were more spiritual than flesh, one person noted that they reflected God's glory. On the question of being in God's image and likeness, I pointed out that Orthodoxy sees our image in God as reflecting his beauty or glory (as just mentioned). Our likeness is reflected in our willingness to seek goodness. Discussion ensued about

how much this was the case for us, especially concerning our ability to do what is good.

Under the heading, *Before The Fall*, we discussed what could be learned from this story about our responsibilities towards creation today. A number of aspects were noted: that we must “take care of the earth”, that we are to name things, multiply, have dominion, which literally means to take care of or have custody over, and that Adam and Eve were vegetarian at that time. We then discussed the implications of our responsibilities toward the local environment. Respect for the environment was mentioned and also the implication of our eating of meat. Someone made the point about how much more energy it takes to produce a meal of meat compared to fruits or crops. I then talked about the Orthodox idea that we are a microcosm and the cosmic role that this implies. This was a new concept for most of the group.

Under the heading, *The Fall*, they all knew which tree they ate from. Someone mentioned that they felt shame and nakedness and so, hid from God. I then explained that Orthodox Tradition says that their bodies became denser and are as we experience them today, subject to pain, suffering and disease. The question of what would have happened if they ate of the tree of life created quite a lot of discussion. One person even speculated whether we would even exist today if they had.

Another implication mentioned under the heading, *After The Fall*, was that the earth was now cursed and does not cooperate in being productive. I talked about how we still need to care for the earth and that this is necessary for inner sanctity. I then talked about how are bodies are now prone to sin. For instance, where Adam and Eve had just appetites, we now also have passions. Where they simply attached to God and the earth, we now want to possess it. Where they were once personally very close to God and the

earth, we now experience alienation and commit injustices.

We then moved onto the story of Cain and Abel and discussed how the effect of alienation, which Cain experienced, is still with us today. One person said that greed was still the major issue today.

I was fascinated to hear from them that they disagreed with the Roman idea that we inherited the guilt of Adam as well as their sin. They said it did not make sense.

Unfortunately, we did not examine the questions in the Fourth and Fifth Movements as time had run out and everyone was getting very tired.

Session Six: An Orthodox Anthropology, February 8, 2003

In the First Movement, we listed various aspects of ourselves, aside from our bodies. These consisted of the spirit and soul, intellect, knowledge, personality, emotions, behavior, conscience, imagination, memory and perceptions.

When they were asked in the Second Movement how these various parts affect us, one person raised the long-standing scientific debate over our genetic make up versus behavioral conditioning.

I then moved to the Third Movement and described the Orthodox definition of the intellect, which comprises our imagination, memory and reason. When they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed, a couple of people said yes, with a couple of additions. These included our emotions and communication as well as the impact of the environment. I did point out that we were only looking at the intellect. We then discussed how these traits can be used for good or bad. No one had any problem understanding this. The same was true about our appetites. Everyone agreed that they

are good because God created them.

Recognizing that they are good, we then spent a short time defining what are appetites. The notion that the group felt was best to describe them was, those traits within us, which create desires. The group was also quick to point out that desires are okay in themselves but when they want to indulge, just for pleasure, they go wrong. This would lead to any number of sins such as greed and success in worldly terms. We also discussed what temptation is and what it can lead to. I pointed out that Christ was tempted in the desert but it was agreed that temptations could initiate the path to sin. One person, who is completing her doctorate in clinical psychology, mentioned that her experience in counseling made her realize that people's intent was crucial in dealing with temptation in a broad range of areas.

We then turned to the passage from Romans 7: 14 – 25. This passage was unfamiliar to the group. I read it myself and then looked at how St. Paul described himself. He said that part of him was spiritual and part was unspiritual (vs.14). He also mentions his will (vs.16), his true self (vs.20), his inner self (vs.22), his body (vs.23), his mind (vs.23) and the unspiritual law within him (vs.23). He also talks about a battle within himself (vs.23) and that his body is doomed to death (vs.24).

I then drew a diagram to describe what is the Orthodox anthropology and showed how this relates to what St. Paul says in this passage. We then moved through the prepared questions. Part of this included a discussion on the Greek word *synergy*. Most had heard the word before and some of them defined it as a form of cooperation. I then went on to describe the Orthodox concept that God initiates a relationship with us by his grace but that we must respond to it. Someone actually used the word 'response' in

describing *synergy* as cooperation. I also explained that this cooperation is not between equals. Even so, God still requires our response. I then talked about an application of this in the confessional context and how God helps us with our faults over time. We sometimes therefore do not even realize this is happening. I also talked about the Greek word *ascesis* and how this is essential in controlling our bodies. This was not difficult for them to grasp and we discussed fasting as an example.

Concerning the factor of pride in Adam's fall, one person said he could not understand how two simple people could be treated so harshly, since they did not know right from wrong. In the discussion that followed, someone countered that the sin of Adam was one of disobedience and a lack of faith in God because the serpent had tricked him into disbelieving God.

In the Fourth Movement, where I ask someone to share some form of internal battle they have been through, one person reflected how, earlier in his life, the lease on his business was terminated abruptly and he lost a lot of money as a result. He said it took a lot to control his anger towards the landlord and this was a big battle for him. On the question of whether the intellectual disciplines were good for us or not, one young person mentioned that proper motivation was very important and that this was linked to controlling our imaginations. Regarding Patriarch Bartholomew's statement that cooperation was needed between science and religion, one young person could not see a connection between the two and said that this is why clashes occur between them. A number of people disagreed and said they can cooperate.

In the Fifth Movement, where we reflect on how these matters connect to the kingdom of God, one person said that the Tradition of the Church (including the

scriptures) gives us a good ethical and moral basis to live by. Another said that we must direct our energies toward humanitarian practices instead of warlike ones. Concerning what we must do to cooperate with God, one person mentioned that we must resist the consumerist mentality of society and so, we must change our life styles. Making the right consumer choices with such items as food or cars is very important. Another said that having an attitude of humility rather than pride is essential in making such proper choices. Also, recycling products and waste reduction are central in these decisions and we should look for alternatives like car-pooling.

One person also asked why we were using the parish hall rather than the conference room. It was necessary for me to respond, since I made this decision. I said that I had thought about it but I very much wanted a room where light was coming in and this was not so in the conference room. I also took the opportunity to mention that there was a local group, which focused on global warming and energy consumption. It was made up mostly of scientists and I want to invite them to join us at some point to examine our church building and make suggestions about how to improve in this area. The group was enthusiastic about this. I finally added a thought to the previous discussion on consumer choices by talking about our consumption of meat. I mentioned that neither the bible nor the Church was against eating meat but it is obvious that the Church wants us to control our consumption of it. I mentioned that when I lived in the Middle East for a year in 1988, I realized how much less meat they ate compared to what I was used to, even though we ate the same dishes and menus. Some of them, who still have close ties to the Middle East, strongly concurred.

For once, we covered all the movements of Thomas Groome's educational

method. I was pleased to hear from one of the young people after the session that she hoped the group would continue when the project was finished and that we would be able to link up to other community groups for local projects, which were beyond the scope of the parish. It was a personally satisfying note to finish on after a good discussion.

Session Seven: The Issue of Secularism, February 15, 2003

We only had twelve people attend the morning's session. It was bitterly cold (-6 degrees F.) and some were sick.

It was interesting to me when we commenced the discussion on secularism that the group saw it as a positive aspect of our society. For instance, they said it was a buffer against religious wars, it stopped discrimination in the work place and stopped any particular interest group from dominating another. When asked if it bothered them, they all said, not really.

In the Second Movement, when they were asked to give examples of how it impacts them, one person who is a teacher complained that she once had to give a lesson on *Hanukah* but could not give one on Christmas. This provoked a lot of animated discussion and it was difficult to keep them focused on the task at hand. Issues like the Jewish control of the American media and the Jewish political lobby as well as the possible war with Iraq, all flared at once. Even speculation of making Israel a more secular state was discussed. It finally settled down and we moved on to how secularism impacts the Church. I found it interesting that the discussion was much more objective on this. Examples such as keeping prayer out of government schools, abortion and not using God in the national anthem were cited. When I asked how it impacts the Church

calendar, I had to explain that I was talking about the Liturgical Calendar. The dropping of Good Friday as a holiday was also brought up. The commercialization of the nativity of Christ was mentioned and someone acrimoniously asserted that the Jews allow the Christmas holiday to go on because they can make money out of it but if this were not the case, their lobbyists would soon have it stamped out of our culture! Irrespective of imaginative conspiracy theories, everyone agreed that it could have detrimental effects on Church life. I was fascinated to observe how this discussion had changed the group's initial benign thinking about this subject to a more critical one.

In the Third Movement, the group could not understand the first question (see page 66). I think that the word "material" would be better to contrast with the divine rather than "human". Most still found the question hard to grasp so I talked about the Orthodox contention that the two spheres need to be connected.

I gave an example of myself from just the previous day. Through a local group called the Global Warming Action Network (GWAN), I was invited to visit a project at the Cayuga Community College, which belongs to a county just outside of Syracuse. They have recently installed a new heating system using Geo-Thermal technology. A number of county and town representatives and engineers were present and towards the end, one of them asked me why I was there. I then explained my doctoral project and dissertation topic and I went on to explain how I felt it was central in our Christian theology of creation to make our energy usage more efficient with less impact on the environment. They became very excited to hear me talk about this and were very happy with my presence. The engineer, who is a member of GWAN, mentioned that the clinching selling factor to use this technology for this community college was that it

would reduce the greenhouse gases by 57% compared to traditional methods of heating. He said the fact that this was the deciding factor in the decision shows that there is a willing ground swell in the community to respond to this issue even without a strong understanding of the theology of creation. My very presence reassured these community leaders about this theology. I then said I hope that this Local Committee will influence our parish to become more environmentally aware and how this issue is central to Orthodox theology.

From this example, another person who is active in teaching children about environmental issues mentioned that secularists in society are very happy to use faith based groups to advocate their cause because they know they need us but that we should be cautious of their agendas because they can be very manipulative. Thus, one has to be careful in combining the two spheres.

On the question of keeping sacred space within closed quarters, the group could easily see how this happens and the schoolteacher's experience mentioned above was recalled. Examples of how the Orthodox Church combines the two spheres were the blessing of homes, buildings, lakes and seas. The couple that is engaged mentioned the blessing of marriages. Everyone agreed that they did not like the sacred being confined to private places. One gave the comparison that pornography is regarded as being okay by society if it is kept within private quarters and the danger is that the Church's spiritual life could be relegated to the same level of behavior as that of social deviants. That same person, who is a Church chanter, said he used to be afraid to mention his church activities to the team he plays rugby with but now he is not afraid and believes that Christians should not hide their talents under a bushel, which secularism pressures us to.

Most agreed that the hope for “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is important to them in their daily lives. One person said that he only thinks about this at the Sunday Divine Liturgy while another said that it is important to him but he is not conscious of it except when he prays in the morning and night. The rest said they were almost always conscious of it.

Concerning the linking of the sacred and the profane in our church building and worship, examples such as the icons in the church, the blessing of the church garden each year and the blessing of food were given. In regard to church bells, most of them mentioned that this custom was very important back in the Middle East but would serve little purpose here because our people do not live close enough to hear them.

In the Fourth Movement, everyone agreed that it is good for the Church to proclaim itself publicly. They affirmed that they see their work and study as being sacred and most of them said they are not afraid to tell people they are Orthodox Christians or, about their parish when they asked. The last question of “where do you think we need to draw the line about these public proclamations?” had come up in the previous discussions. It was agreed that a balance was needed. For instance, an example was given about an evangelist who was recently on television who was offensive because he put down others who were different from him. From the discussion that ensued, it was agreed that how one proclaims the Church is paramount in this context.

In the Fifth Movement, the notion of “Thy Kingdom come” was re-discussed and everyone said it was a realistic part of his or her lives. Some said it was very much the case. All said it is connected to their relationship with others and how they treat people. Concerning the last question about the earth and our hope of getting to heaven, they said

that because it was created by God and is our place to live, it is centrally connected to this hope. Everyone therefore agreed that it must be respected and cared for on all levels. The group must have been particularly politically conscious this day because someone then mentioned the futility of the Bush Administration's energy policies and how it was dismantling a lot of the legal protections previously established to protect the environment.

Session Eight: Orthodox Responses, February 15, 2003

This session was held after lunch, on the same day as the previous session. We had eight people apart from myself remain for the discussion.

For this session, I went through the questions as listed under the three headings of *Repentance, Asceticism and Contemplation*.

For the first question under the heading, *Repentance*, the entire group said they were concerned about the destruction of the environment, especially for their children. They said it makes them feel both sad and joyful. They felt sad because of the destruction but joyful because of the beauty they see around them. One gave an example of a recent trip he and his wife took to Oswego, NY, on Lake Ontario. He said that the combination of the waves and the wind on the lake with the sunshine sparkling on the spraying water, which immediately freezes in the air and falls creating innumerable shapes and forms, was most spectacular. One can find great beauty even in the most frigid of weather. In regard to what needs to be repented about, one person mentioned the abuse and mismanagement of the planet. I suggested they go back to the story of the Fall and another person then mentioned greed as being one of the worst things since then.

In discussing what repentance meant, aspects such as regret and the wish to look within us were noted as examples. Another said that such experiences of repentance should translate into action and thereby cause a change in the person.

For the Second Movement, they mentioned life style choices and reconnecting to the elements on the local level as being important. A number of examples were given such as recycling, the proper use of lights and the use of a compost heap at the church site. We will be looking at this list in more detail in the near future, as one of the objectives of the project is to develop such an action list.

In the Third Movement, someone mentioned that the sins of Adam and Cain, together with the unfaithfulness, which Israel showed to God in their covenant with him, as being major examples of breaking God's commandments. Today, consumerism with its emphasis on possessions goes against God's commandments. Also, money is seen as a god.

In regard to the gift of tears, the lady who works for an organization which educates children on the issue of the environment, says that she finds the frustrations overwhelming at times and this can bring her to tears. She said that the closer one gets to the issue, the more possible it is to cry over it. The head of the Local Committee mentioned that he finds it hard to cry at any time and although he is very concerned about this issue, it is not at a point where he would cry over it. I concurred with this self-reflection. At the same time, everyone agreed that this gift has biblical roots and, while perhaps most of us could not identify with it, we could see the necessity for some to take on this role.

I then discussed the importance of the Eucharistic celebration as a way of atoning

for the human desecration of the world. I read to them a segment from the DM10 paper I have written, titled, *An Orthodox Christian Theology of Creation and the Environment: Written in Preparation for a Doctor of Ministry Project on Ecology*, under the sub-heading, *The Priestly Role and the Eucharist*, on pages 24-25. I explained to them how the Eucharist combines the two spheres, where we offer back to God what he has already given us and that through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, this offering renews all that we offer God. I also mentioned that it is vital in Orthodoxy that we always attempt to make our life experiences eucharistic, no matter how profane the circumstances may seem. This was a new concept for the group.

In the Fourth Movement, perhaps I was tired, but I could not immediately think of any persons in the Orthodox Church who had this gift and said I would research this by the next session.

In the Fifth Movement, I talked about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul refers to in his first letter to the Corinthians, and I mentioned that all such gifts are good if they are used for the edification of the community.

Under the heading, *Asceticism*, all those present practiced some form of fasting. We did have some discussion about fasting in our hectic society and most said that they adjust according to the situation. I also mentioned that there is a danger in becoming legalistic on this. In contrast, one person in the group is a vegetarian and the question of how much meat and dairy products we should eat came up again. Every one agreed that decisions about making choices for energy output were important. One person copied off a list of “do’s and don’ts” from a recent newspaper article and it was distributed to each person.

We then went to the Fifth Movement and discussed the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. The connection between environmental responsibility and loving justice was obvious to everyone. We therefore moved onto the American practice of cutting down Christmas trees for the festive season. As might be expected, this sparked off some debate. Two of the eight present used live trees and this was firmly criticized by the others.

Under the heading, *Contemplation*, nobody had any problem connecting the beauty of nature with our ability to contemplate the wonder of God's creation. The Third Movement, however, which touched on monasticism, sparked off a fierce debate. One person, who was baptized Orthodox but raised Lutheran and grew up in Bethlehem, Palestine, was vehemently opposed to the type of monasticism he experienced in the Middle East. He believes that the institution is hypocritical and corrupt. Any suggestion that this might be an extreme view was rebuffed as a delusion. I did point out that the monastic life is of no value if it does not serve the community and that we have the example of Jesus who went to the mountains to pray. He definitely believed that it was not compatible with our American culture.

In regard to the various stages of prayer, I talked about the experiences of both the East and West, using St. Maximos the Confessor and St. Teresa of Avila as examples.

We had been meeting for over two hours, so I decided to conclude at this point. I mentioned that next week would be our last session for the project but we would continue the group in a less formal way. I also mentioned that we would do a field excursion when the weather will be warmer and we would meet at some convenient time with the Syracuse Global Warming Action Network as well. I will prepare a questionnaire to be

filled out by the participants next week to assess the project and see if it met any of the objectives listed on pages 32-34 of the Proposal Colloquium.

Session Nine: Liturgical Texts, February 22, 2003

We had twelve people present for this session. Once again, the morning was bitterly cold at –6degrees F.

We began by defining the word, Liturgy. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church defines it as “people” and “work”. Thus, it was originally connected to any public work and later on became associated with services of the Temple. From this definition, we then had a discussion about how it applies today. The liturgical setting was contrasted to any form of private prayer. From this emerged that the various services we have at church come under this category. Further, even though the Sunday Divine Liturgy was the most significant service, it was not the only one. Everyone felt that these services were relevant in their lives and could mean a great deal.

We then turned to what connections these services might have with creation. One person said the Psalms were very significant to him and then another said he found many references from the Scriptures in the services about creation. Psalms 104 and 24 were noted as examples. Another mentioned that the phrase, “Let my prayer rise like incense before you” from Psalm 141, which is used in Vespers, meant a lot to her.

The question formulated in the Second Movement, was a challenge to most of the younger people. They had never connected their experience of nature with the Liturgy. While some said it connected, no one could say in what way. This gave me an opportunity to describe a number of connections that I felt were important. I used examples of where the Church takes basic products such as bread, wine, oil and water

and sanctifies them in the rituals and prayers of the services. I also talked about the importance of intercessory prayer and the community's ability to join in a priestly, Eucharistic way in the Divine Liturgy. I also specified our concerns for the environment and how they can be offered back to God. One young person said he had never made these connections before.

I then referred to the printed sheet (see below), which gives some Orthodox liturgical references about creation. I used this to point out the obvious connections to creation. They were particularly interested in the reference to Holy Saturday morning, which connects the book of Daniel with St. Paul's theme of dying to ourselves and living in the risen Christ. The reference to calling upon God to take charge of creation once again because of the resurrection was also new to them.

After this, I took them into the church building and talked about its icons. I pointed out that there was supposed to be a standard layout of icons within the church to show the connection between Salvation History and creation. This again was new to them but they did appreciate the explanation.

We returned to the parish hall and for the question of the Fourth Movement (see page 74), one person made a plea that we continue some form of these discussions to examine such connections further and reflect how to respond to creation in our daily lives. I said I would wait to see the response from the questionnaire I formulated and which I handed out to them at that point.

When asked if anyone would like to share what they have experienced and learnt from the sessions with the rest of the parish, one elderly person expressed his frustration at trying to bring the parish forward and grow. I pointed out that a number of people

besides those here would have come to the discussions if it had been during the week. I also mentioned that several people in the parish had expressed genuine interest in how the discussions were progressing and were pleased to hear that those attending them had enjoyed them. This person later told me that he would like to speak to the parish at some point. Another wondered how useful speaking after Divine Liturgy would be and I responded by saying that all one can do in such a forum is share one's experience and how it changed them. Another person said that we could use our monthly parish newsletter or the weekly bulletin. I was pleased to hear this initiative and will ask one or two of them to write something in either of these forums.

I then spoke about my vision for the future of the group. I mentioned that our work was not yet finished, even though my dissertation will have been finalized, because I wanted to do the field trip when the weather was warmer and I want to invite the group called the Global Warming Action Network of Syracuse, New York, to look at our building and help us link in with the wider community for possible practical projects. Beyond this, I would like the younger members to form into a team ministry group, which would be endorsed by the Archdiocese as the St. John the Divine team ministry. For the older members, I will begin a bible study group for weekdays.

I concluded by mentioning that we would have a barbeque to offer my thanks and celebrate the project when the weather is a little warmer and I thanked all those who attended the sessions. Everyone seemed to be more than happy to have been part of the project.

Session Nine: Some Liturgical Texts on Creation, February 22, 2003

There are many references to creation in our liturgical services. Here is a sample.

In the Divine Liturgy after the Consecration we say:

Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee, in behalf of all and for all

Before Communion, the priest ties in the theme of sanctifying material elements with us:

Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake thereof.

In Sunday Orthros

Thy Resurrection, O Christ Savior, hath illuminated the whole universe. Thou hast renewed thy creation, O Lord Almighty. Glory to Thee. By the tree, O Savior, thou hast removed the curse that was caused by a tree.

On Holy Saturday Morning the Orthodox Church links up the three holy youths from the Book of Daniel 3: 1-23 with Paul's theme (Rom. 6: 3-11) of connecting the dying to ourselves with the gaining of new life in Christ in baptism which, in turn, gives us the ability to intercede on behalf of creation. Then the passage of the empty tomb (Mt. 28: 1-20) is read, but just before this we call upon God to take charge of creation again, with the verse: "Arise O God and judge the earth; for You shall take all nations to your inheritance."

For Pentecost:

Light is the Father; and Light the Son; Light is the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles in fiery tongues, through which the whole universe was illuminated to worship the holy Trinity.

For the Nativity of Christ:

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, proclaiming the present mystery; for he hath broken the middle wall of partition, and the flaming spear shall turn about, and the cherubim shall admit all to the tree of life. As for me, I shall return to enjoy the bliss of paradise from which I was driven away before by reason of iniquity;

And:

O Light of Light, O Radiance of the Father, thou hast illuminated all creation.

For the Epiphany:

Today hath shone the Son that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord. Today the moon shineth with the world in its radiating beams. Today the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendor of their radiance. Today the clouds from heaven moisten mankind with showers of justice. Today the Uncreated accepteth of his own will the laying on of hands by his own creation.

Questionnaire on Discussion Sessions

On the method used:

Did you find the question format for the discussions helpful or not? _____

Would you have preferred another type of format such as lecturing? _____

If so, what type? _____

Were the sessions very informative, somewhat informative or, not very informative?

Were they very stimulating, somewhat stimulating, not very stimulating or, boring?

On the content provided:

To what extent has it increased your knowledge of the Orthodox Church?

Very much to some extent Not very much

Have you been able to make connections with the Orthodox theology we have discussed and the environment? _____

If so: Many connections some connections Very few connections

Topic selection:

Over the time we have met, we have covered nine topics:

1. Introductory discussion
2. An Orthodox understanding of the Trinity
3. The Orthodox method of interpreting the Scriptures
4. The creation of the world from nothing
5. The Fall of Adam and Eve and what this meant to us and the material world

6. An Orthodox anthropology or human make up
7. Secularism
8. The Orthodox responses of Repentance, Asceticism, Contemplation and Intercession (through the Eucharist) for the environment
9. An examination of liturgical texts and how they tie into the issue

Is there any topic(s) you would have liked more emphasis on or, would like to pursue in the future? _____ If yes, which one(s)? _____

Was there any not covered in this issue that you would like to study? _____

Follow up:

Some of you mentioned that you enjoyed the biblical analysis we did throughout the sessions. Would you like an ongoing Bible Study class? _____

If so, what day of the week is best for you? _____

Daytime or evening? _____

Some of you mentioned your interest in forming a parish team ministry group to take on some self selected projects. Our archdiocese has formalized such groups into the Fellowship of St. John the Divine. Would you like to be part of such a group?

_____ Are there any areas you would like to explore? _____

Some of you mentioned you would like to interact with the Syracuse community on the environment. Would you like to do this? _____ Are there any areas you would like to explore? _____

Communication

One of my objectives for this project is to communicate what we have discussed with the rest of the parish. To what extent do you think the rest of the parish needs to know about the material we have discussed?

Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

Would you like to speak at the end of Liturgy on Sunday about it? _____

If so, please write your name here: _____

In preparing this project, I had to list some objectives that I would like to achieve while doing it. The following questions reflect these objectives. Please answer honestly and directly. There are no right or wrong answers.

Is this issue of the environment an urgent one today? _____ Can you think of

Any ways that this is so? _____

Has the fall of Adam and Eve contributed to this? _____

If so, in what ways? _____

Even so, Orthodoxy says that God gave us a unique role in the universe and when Christ came on earth and sacrificed himself on the cross, he restored this role.

What is the unique role that we have here? _____

What gift did Christ give us by sacrificing himself? _____

What is its highest expression? _____

Has this connection between our worship and its cosmic dimension occurred to you before these discussions? _____ Do you think people in the parish understand this connection? _____

We say that, because of the Fall, our bodies were corrupted. What Christian practices do we use in the Church to redress our fallen nature? List them:

Because of Secularism, Orthodoxy says that a major problem today is the disconnection between the spiritual and material worlds. Did the discussions help you reconnect them? For instance, is the Sunday Divine Liturgy still separate from your life during the rest of the week? _____ If it is not separate, how do you connect your work life and

home life to the Liturgy? _____

What about the Church's liturgical seasons such as Easter, Lent, Christmas and Epiphany? Have the discussions helped you to make connections with the material

world? _____ If so, a lot to some extent not much

There are a lot of excellent practical projects being done in the community. Perhaps we will start some this parish. How do we connect the spiritual world to such projects?

More questions!

How have you aggravated the pollution of the environment? _____
Did the project help you to see the need to repent for what is happening to our planet?

How has Secularism affected your worldview? _____

How does the Orthodox approach compare to this? _____

How do the Orthodox ascetic practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving connect to the environment? _____

How does the planet and the environment related to the Orthodox liturgical life and blessings? _____

How does it relate to an Orthodox church building structure and its icons?

What did you like best about the discussions? _____

What did you like least about them? _____

Are there any further general comments your would like to make?

Summary of Responses to Questionnaire

Fourteen people returned their questionnaire forms.

In regard to the method I used, everyone found the discussion format helpful. Only one person suggested another type of format, which was to break the group into smaller segments and then come back to the larger group. Twelve found the sessions very informative while two found them somewhat so. Ten found them very stimulating but four found them to be somewhat the case.

Concerning the content provided, six said the discussions increased their knowledge of the Orthodox Church very much, seven this was somewhat the case and one person said it did not increase his knowledge very much. Thirteen said the discussions enabled them to make connections with the Orthodox Church and the environment. Of these, six said they made many connections and seven said they made some connections. I was very happy to read that everyone would have liked more emphasis on at least some of the topics discussed. Listed below are the numbers of those who wanted more emphasis for each of the topics:

1. Introductory discussion – two
2. An Orthodox understanding of the Trinity - five
3. The Orthodox method of interpreting the Scriptures - six
4. The creation of the world from nothing - three
5. The Fall of Adam and Eve and what this meant to us and the material world - four
6. An Orthodox anthropology or human make up - six
7. Secularism - four

8. The Orthodox responses of Repentance, Asceticism, Contemplation and Intercession (through the Eucharist) for the environment - four

9. An examination of liturgical texts and how they tie into the issue - four

In regard to follow up, everyone said they would like to be involved in ongoing bible study classes and ten of them said they would like to part of a team ministry group. For the team ministry activities, the topics listed as areas in which they would like to be engaged were: Humanitarian/ theological activities, congregational relations and understanding, community service, food/ clothing assistance for the poor and three people said they would like to follow up on the topic of the environment. Seven of them said they would like to interact with the wider Syracuse community and five said prefer not to.

In the area of communication, nine said that the parish very much needs to know about the material discussed, four said to some extent and one said just a little. Of these, five said they would like to speak to the parish as a whole after Sunday Church services. As a result of the suggestion in the last session by some of the group to write an article in the parish newsletter or bulletin, I will follow up on who would like to contribute in this way. Thirteen of them said that the issue of the environment was an urgent one today and when asked in what ways everyone responded. Some of the answers were: because of pollution, waste, war, lack of legal protection, destruction of ecosystems and garbage.

The theological questions that followed were the least accurately answered. Eleven of the fourteen did say that Adam and Eve contributed to the ecological crisis and of these, six said that greed was the greatest result; four said that pride was the biggest cause and one said that their sin resulted in a lost balance in the ecosystem. From this I

conclude that most of them grasped the theological implications for the environment from the sin of Adam and Eve.

In regard to our unique role in the universe five people said that we have been given the role of custodians of the earth. This answer is correct but I was looking for the Orthodox emphasis that we are the interface between the material and immaterial worlds. The two are connected so maybe it was a matter of using the right language to express it. It is easy to forget that they are not theologians. Other answers were free will, knowledge, living a Godly life, spreading the Word, being made in God's image and spreading Orthodoxy. Obviously, some had no idea what the question meant.

On the question of what unique gift did Christ give us, everyone gave good answers but no one said priestly intercession, which is what I was looking for. I think if I had added the phrase "in regard to the environment" they would have been more focused to the answer I was looking for. Even so, this is an aspect I will spend more time on when we re-gather.

Concerning what is the highest expression of this, no one said the Eucharist. There is an obvious gap here, which I failed to bridge and this area will also need more work. One person did say that it was to offer ourselves up to others. When asked if they had understood the cosmic dimension of our worship before these discussions, seven said yes and five said no. In regard to which Christian practices can help redress our fallen nature, everyone said the sacraments and prayer, while some said almsgiving and two said by fasting.

Concerning the connection between Sunday worship and our daily lives, ten said the connection is obvious to them, two said it was sometimes and two said no. One of the

latter made the comment that he has been thinking about this more since the discussions. I was pleased to read this and will follow up with this person to help him to understand it more. I was pleased to read that thirteen of them said the discussions have helped them to connect the environment to the great liturgical feasts of the Church calendar. Of these, three said it helped them a lot and ten said it helped them to some extent.

Under the heading, “More questions!” on the last page, overall, I was encouraged by the answers to these questions. There are seven questions in this section and they reflect the objectives (see pages 77 – 78) I was hoping to achieve for the project. Most of the respondents answered all of the questions and showed at least some grasp of the concepts asked of them. Some gave incisive answers. For instance, on the question of how do Orthodox ascetic practices connect to the environment, ten people mentioned energy reduction and helping to become more aware of the environment. This last point is very encouraging because we are still waiting for the weather to warm up for the last session which is a field trip intended to reflect on and experience the environment. At the same time, one person was quite vague in his answers and probably did not grasp the questions. Overall though, I feel confident that, given the positive answers by most, these objectives were achieved for the majority.

For the last two questions, most mentioned that learning from each other was what they liked best about the sessions. Surely this indicates that the educational method of Thomas Groome worked well. They not only found them stimulating and challenging but also enjoyable. Given the heavy nature of most of the topics, this is very gratifying. In regard to what they disliked the most, seven actually said there was nothing they disliked! Four mentioned that we ran out of time and one mentioned that the sessions

were too compact and should be more spread out. This is something I strongly agree with and is my main self-criticism. It would be much better to spread out the sessions over six months rather than a few weeks as this would have given me more time to follow through with any personal needs of the group and individuals to absorb the material more. Even so, the compact time frame of these sessions has created a lot of interest and momentum. A number of other people in the parish have expressed a desire to do these sessions in the near future during the week when they are freer to be available.

Evaluation

The question is asked in *The Doctor of Ministry Manual*, under the heading, *Doctoral Proposals and Papers*, whether or not the project accomplishes its intended results? I feel confident that the objectives of the project have mostly been achieved. I also believe that the Local Committee has deepened its theological awareness of this issue, which is one of my goals for the project. It has also created a considerable amount of interest in the parish and momentum within the group to continue its educational development. As for the second goal that it would create a renewal of their faith, it is more difficult to say and not as clear as I would have liked to have seen at this point. I do think some factors such as the season and frigid weather have had a bearing on their ability to attend, especially towards the end. Given the momentum, it will be necessary to follow up with further projects.

The biggest unexpected insight for me was the parish's yearning for knowledge of their faith and consequent wish to continue the group. I have obviously tapped into a real need for the parish. I had also mentioned on page 58 that I describe the project as an

“interactive educational engagement.” As far as I am concerned, this was the central process of the project and confirmed my hopes for this to be the case. One of the problems for those interested in ecology is that there is a big gap between those who feel strongly about the issue and the general populace. What is gratifying is that I believe that this process can be used effectively as a tool in bridging this gap. In this aspect I hope that it will be of use to others. For myself, I have learnt a great deal about the topic as I have studied it and this has deepened my faith. Both of these aspects have been very fulfilling.

Conclusion

Because a theology of creation goes to the heart of one’s faith and because our environment is of great concern to many today, I believe that this aspect of ministry has many implications. Because the implications of this theology connect so closely with our day-to-day life, I believe we are forced to take it into account if we wish to live out our Christian calling faithfully. What is amazing about it is that it embraces the greatest social and global issues of our time but also confronts us down to the most local level. On the parish level, no church committee or board can responsibly ignore it. The pastor’s ministry must engage the parishioners’ consciousness so that they become much more aware of this responsibility, a challenge which may seem daunting but surely a very satisfying one to take on. Further, the practical decisions which must be made to reduce energy output and pollution must be seen as a sacred task in which we are called to sanctify and intercede on behalf of this planet that God has made us stewards of.

WORKS CITED

- Auvray, Paul, *Creation*, in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by Xavier Leon-Dufour. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969.
- Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the Address of His All Holiness, *Revelation and the Environment AD 95-1995*, upon the opening of *The International Environmental Symposium at Sea*. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate Web Site.
- Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the address of His All Holiness at the *Opening Ceremony of Summer Seminar on Halki*, Holy Trinity Monastery, June 12, 1995. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate/Archdiocese of America/Orthodox Ministry Access/Orthodox World News Web Site.
- Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Address of His All Holiness at the *Environmental Symposium*, Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, CA 8 Nov., 1997.
- Breck, John, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.
- Breck, John, *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. Crestwood, NY, 1986.
- Butterworth, Robert, S.J., *No. 5: Theology of Creation in Theology Today Series*. Edited by Edward Yarnold, S.J. England: The Mercier Press, Cork, 1969.
- Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Xavier Leon-Dufour, Editor. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969.
- Chryssavgis, John, *Beyond the Shattered Image*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Light & Life Publishing, 1999.

- Eliade, Mircea, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1971.
- Fortman, Edmund J., S.J., *The Theology of Man and Grace: Commentary*. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966.
- Groome, Thomas H., *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980.
- Harakas, Stanley Sameul, *Living the Faith: The Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Light & Life Publishing Company, 1992.
- Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development and Study Guide*, developed by the Advisory Committee of the Presbyterian Church (USA) on Social Witness Policy. Louisville, KY: Published by the Office of the General Assembly, 1996.
- Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Damascus, Syria, *An Orthodox Theology of Creation*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Christian Society of the Green Cross, 1989.
- John, Metropolitan of Pergamon, *Orthodoxy and Ecological Problems: A Theological Approach*. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate Web Site.
- Keselopoulos, Anestis G., *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, translated by Elizabeth Theokritoff. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.
- Krueger, Frederick W., compiler and editor, *Orthodox Patriarchs and Heirarchs articulate a Theology of Creation: A Brief and Partial Survey*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 1998.
- Krueger, Frederick W., *A Nature Trail Through the Bible: An Ecological Tour of Key Passages*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2000.
- Krueger, Frederick W., *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity, Fourth Edition*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2002.
- Krueger, Frederick W., *The Ecological Responsibility of the Orthodox Parish: A Guide to Parish Program Development*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Christian Society of the Green Cross, 2002.
- Krueger, Frederick W., *The Lord's House: A Guide to Creation: Careful Management of Church Facilities*. Wynnewood, PA: A Green Cross - Macalester Park Book, 1995.

- Liturgikon, The: The Book of Divine Services for the Priest and Deacon*, Second Edition. New York, NY: Antakya Press, 1989.
- Musurillo, S.J, Herbert, translator and editor, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.
- McKenzie, John, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible*. London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1975.
- Nassar, Reverend Seraphim, *Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ*, Second Edition. Brooklyn, NY: Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and All North America, 1961.
- Papadeas, Father George, *Greek Orthodox Holy Week & Easter Services: A New English Translation*. South Daytona, FL: Patmos Press, 1997.
- Philokalia, The, Volume II*, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, translated from the Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
- Popescu, Dimitri, *Toward an Orthodox Ecological Education: The Theological and Spiritual Principles*. Presented at the Summer Seminar on Halki 1994 (June 20). Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate Web Site.
- Rahner, Karl, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel. London: Burns & Oates, 1970.
- Rossi, Fr. Vincent, *To Liturgize the World: The Cosmo-ecological Ethos of Eastern Orthodoxy*. Santa Rosa, CA: Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2000.
- Scheffeczyk, Leo, *Creation and Providence*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- Schmemmann, Alexander, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979.
- Schoonenberg, Piet, *The Christ*, translated by Della Couling. London: Sheed & Ward, 1972.
- Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church according to the use of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Ninth Edition*. Englewood, NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 1971.
- Sherrard, Philip, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998.
- Smulders, Pieter and Darlap, Adolf, *Creation*, in the *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner. London: Burns & Oates,

1975.

The Documents of Vatican II edited by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. and translated by Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher. New York: Corpus Books, 1966.

Thunberg, Lars, *Man and the Cosmos: the Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.

Van Dyke, Fred, Mahan, David C., Sheldon, Joseph K. & Brand, Raymond H., *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Vlavianos-Arvanitis, Dr. Agni, *Biopolitics - The Bio-Environment: Biocentric Values and Ethics for the Next Millenium*. Taken from the Ecumenical Patriarchate/Archdiocese of America/Orthodox Ministry Access/Orthodox World News Web Site, 1998.

Vrame, Anton C., *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999.

Webster, Noah, *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, Second Edition, Jean L. McKechnie, Editor. Cleavland, OH: Dorset & Baber, 1979.