

THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION IN A WORLD
OF CHANGE TODAY
(Patristic Perspectives)

BY

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A Consensus Patrum.

The doctrine of creation in the Orthodox Tradition has its roots in the Holy Scriptures and in living patristic writings which are based on the cosmological dogmas of the Ancient Church.

This paper does not pretend to be a full analysis of the patristic doctrine of creation, but rather tries to explore how the Church Fathers understood creation and interpreted it in a coherent biblical and dogmatic perspective in the light of the Church's Tradition.

The Early Church was fully conscious of the difficulties inherent in using human terms to describe God's actual being. While Christian teachers were agreed about God's unchangeability, intemporality, immutability and eternity, they nevertheless asked the question: How does such a God move, act, deal with the creation? Wrongly the Fathers were accused of being too «apophatic». On the contrary, they tried to deepen their knowledge of the mystery of the Godhead and the revealed truth of the Triune God's economy. Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, from the very first lines of his *Mystical Theology*, invokes the help of the Holy Trinity, seeking illumination, so that the ineffable and infinite mysteries of theology may be revealed, for they are covered by *agnosia*, a cloud of silence and mystery¹.

To man, however, is given the privilege of penetrating into the mystery of a Triune God. Although he is a fallen creature, deformed and finite, he can attain to the notion that God exists either through

1. Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*; in *P.G.* 3, 997.

the surrounding creation or knowledge in faith. He can obtain a certain theognosia according to St Basil's affirmation². What God really is, is and will remain beyond our capacities of understanding. But how he comes into contact with the creation, this can be known through his activities³. Origen, too, was deeply preoccupied with this mystery. From God's immutability, he goes further, stressing his active presence and intervention through providence and economy in the world's destiny.

When the Triune God remains the very centre of our faith the early Fathers were confronted with further consequent problems. The ongoing process of doctrinal formulation dealt with the relationship in the creation between God-Creator and man as creatures and above all the distinction between God's essence and the divine energies. In doing this they often borrowed terms from existing rich, Platonic, philosophical language and analysis.

Thus we find a continuity of Patristic thought in explaining and interpreting creation in relation with the Trinity in a diachronic perspective and the full harmony of God-Creator and man (*anthropos*) in a created world. Therefore, the Fathers were always trying to find the language of their time, without absolutizing terms and words. Thus we can see a certain coherence between them, which is characterized by its diversity of interpretation, as they express in different terms also the same truth and faith of creation's doctrine and dogma, as they were formulated in the Early Church. Here we have the *Consensus Patrum*.

It is also important to point out that patristic theology in general under-lines the organic synthesis between God's transcendence and his reality in creation and history, referring to these uncreated energies which flow from God's presence. This relationship makes for real and constant human participation in the divine mystery.

God's Creation «ex-nihilo».

The Triune God, out of his extraordinary goodness, created in time first the invisible, the spiritual world; and then the visible, material world, and finally the spiritual and material man⁴.

2. St Basil the Great, *Letters* 233 and 235; in *P.G.* 32, 872.

3. St Cyril of Alexandria, *Con. Julianum*, 3; in *P.G.* 76, 653.

4. Cf. St John of Damascus affirms that the All-Good God, «God, who is good, altogether good, and more than good, who is goodness throughout by reason of the exceeding riches of His goodness. He made first the spiritual and heavenly

He created the invisible world out of nothing «*ex nihilo*»⁵ and this world in six days, he being wholly free and governed by his own good and omnipotent volition, for his own glory, and for the moral perfection and blessedness of his rational and free creatures. The world did not, therefore, come into being by means of pre-existent matter; it is a product of the free-will goodness, wisdom and omnipotence of the Triune God, also created of «out of nothing» (*II Macc* 7:28). Moreover, the world according to St Gregory Palamas did not glow in a natural manner out of the essence of God, nor is it a result of some created action of God⁶. Finally, God did not create the world in order to satisfy some need on his part, inasmuch as God «did not create due to some need of his for our service», says St John Chrysostom⁷.

Rather, as we said, the world is the product of God's goodness, love and sovereignty, «without compulsion, without force»⁸. Since then God who is not only good, but more than good, did not find satisfaction in self-contemplation, but in his exceeding goodness wished certain creatures to come into existence in order to enjoy his blessings and share in his goodness, he brought all things out of nothing into being, creating both the visible and the invisible⁹.

God, then, is the Creator of the world, not because of some essential need on his part, but due to his sovereign will, energy and goodness. The creation, being a sovereign act of God, is not eternal, but had a beginning in time. Origen's belief that the world existed eternally

powers; next the visible and sensible universe; next man (anthropos), with his spiritual and perceptible nature», *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* IV, 13; in *P.G.* 94, 1136.

5. Cf. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 40, 45: «Believe that all that is in the world, both all that is seen and all that is unseen, was made out of nothing by God», in *P.G.* 36, 424. See also St John Chrysostom who affirms very strongly that «To say that creation sprang from pre-existent matter, and not confess the Creator who created all out of nothing — this is a mark of the lowest form of stupidity», *Homily in Genesis* II, 2; in *P.G.* 53, 28.

6. St Gregory Palamas says that «His (God's) action is creative, but He is uncreated. God's creatures, however, possess created energy», *Chapters Natural, Theological, Moral and Practical*, 73; in *P.G.* 150, 1172. In another place, he defends his teaching in the face of that of the Latins, who confuse the essence of God with His actions, thus betraying the essential relationship between Creator and creation, so that, at the same time, creation is deified and God is made equal to His creatures» *op.cit.* col. 1189.

7. St John Chrysostom, *To Those Who Were Scandalized* 7; in *P.G.* 52, 496.

8. *Ibid.*, 56, 180.

9. St John Damascus, *op.cit.*, 2; in *P.G.* 94, 864-5.

was condemned by the Church. The divine will and plan concerning the world existed eternally, God then realizing, bringing into objective reality the «intelligible world», substantiating and bringing it into time: the creation of the «visible world», as the Fathers understood and taught. But God, freely creating the world out of nothing, by no means was dependent upon appearances, prototypes or ideas; just as He had no need of matter, instruments, etc. «Because God, the Creator of all, is without need, humans are dependent one upon the other... But the Maker of all needs neither instruments nor matter, neither time nor labour, neither science nor study; all could not exist without the will of God», affirms Theodoretus of Cyrhus¹⁰.

Thus God creates: «He first conceived, and his conception was a work fulfilled by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit»¹¹. But for St Athanasius «the Father through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, creates all things»¹². Therefore, the Father is the Creator but he creates and acts in collaboration with the other two persons of Holy Trinity. Then the creation has also a close relationship with the trinitarian communion which participates actively during the whole execution of the plan of God. Thus The Father is «the Creator of all things» (I Cor. 8:6; Rom. 11:36). The Son is «through Him all things» (John 1:3; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2); and the Holy Spirit is «ἐν ᾧ τὰ πάντα» - in whom are all things (Gen. 1:2)¹³. Here it is necessary to add that «everything that God the Creator made was very good» (Gen. 1:3). Consequently, the evil which exists in the world does God not come from the good nor did He implant it into the world «for nothing evil was made by God»¹⁴.

The Trinity in Action.

The creation is the work of the Trinity. The Creed names the Father «creator of heaven and earth», the Son «He through whom all

10. Theodoretus of Cyrhus, in *P.G.* 83, 916.

11. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 38, 9; in *P.G.* 36, 320; see also St John of Damascus, *op.cit.* II,2; in *P.G.* 94, 865.

12. St. Athanasius, *Letter to Serapion* I, 28; in *P.G.* 26, 596.

13. Cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* VI, 60; in *P.G.* 11, 1389; see also St Basil: «And in the creation, bethink thee first, I pray thee, of the original Cause of all things that are made, the Father; of the creative Cause, the Son; of the perfecting Cause, the Spirit; so that the ministering spirits subsist by the will of the Father, are brought into being by the operation of the Son, and are perfected by the presence of the Holy Spirit», *On the Holy Spirit* 16, 38; in *P.G.* 32, 136.

14. Cf. St Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolykos*, III, 9; in *P.G.* 6, 1080.

things were made», the Holy Spirit «creator of life» (ζωοποιόν). The will is common to the three and it is this that creates: the Father can therefore not be creator unless the Son and the Spirit are also creators. The Fathers are very preoccupied by this trinitarian function during the creation. Because the Father creates through the Word in the Holy Spirit, says the patristic adage, and St Irenaeus calls the Son and the Spirit «the two hands of God». This is the economic manifestation of the Trinity. The three Persons create together, but each one in a way which is his own, and the created being is the fruit of their collaboration which is done due to their communion of love. According to St Basil, the Father is «the primordial cause of everything that has been made», the Son «the operative cause», the Spirit «the perfecting cause». Rooted in the Father, the action of the Trinity is presented as the double economy of the Son and of the Spirit: the former making the desire of God come into existence, the latter accomplishing it in goodness and beauty; the one calling the creature to lead it to the Father (and His call confers on it its ontological density,) the other helping the creature to respond to this call and communicating perfection to it.

When the Fathers treat the economical manifestation of the Trinity, rather than the name of Son which denotes intra-trinitarian relationships, they prefer that of the Word. The Word, indeed, is revelation, the manifestation of the Father: of someone, in consequence, who binds the notion of the Word to the domain of economy. St Gregory of Nazianzus analyses in his *Fourth Theological Oration* this function of the Word. The Son is the Logos, he says because, while remaining united to the Father, He reveals Him. The Son defines the Father. «The Son is therefore a brief and simple declaration of the nature of the Father». Every created thing has its «dogos», its «essential reason»; and as St Gregory says, «can anything exist which does not lean on the divine Logos?» Nothing exists which is not founded on the Logos, the *raison d' être par excellence*, as V. Lossky affirms. By It has everything been made; It gives to the created world not only the order signified by Its name, but Its very ontological reality¹⁵.

«In the beginning was the Word», writes St John (1:1), and Genesis affirms: «In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth». Origen identifies these two documents: «God», he says, «created everything is His Word, thus through all eternity in Himself». Meister Eckart makes

15. Cf. V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1978, p. 56.

the same identification: the principle evoked in the double *in principio* is for him God as intellect containing the Word as well as the world. Arius, on the contrary, confusing the Greek homonyms «γέννησις», birth, and «γένεσις», creation, interprets St John in terms of Genesis and transforms the Son into a creature.

The Fathers, to underline both the «unknowability» of the divine essence and the divinity of the Son, have distinguished between these two beginnings: a distinction between the work of *nature*, primordial being of God, and the work of will implying relation with the other which is set up by this relation itself. St John thus evokes an eternal «beginning», that of the Word: the term here is analogical and denotes an eternal relationship. On the other hand, «beginning» assumes its full sense in the Genesis text, where the calling forth of the world gives rise to time.

Creation - Time and World.

The world is created, this is a fact, a reality. That means that the world came out of nothing. That means also there was no world, no cosmos before it sprang up and came into being. Therefore because when there was no cosmos before, there was also no time. St Maximus says that «time is reckoned from the creation of the heavens and the earth»¹⁶. Only the world exists in time—in change, succession, duration. Without the world there is no time, and the genesis of the world is the beginning of time¹⁷; and, as St Basil the Great explains very strongly, this beginning is not yet time nor even a fraction of time, just as the beginning of a road is not yet the road itself. It is simple and uncomposite¹⁸. Therefore, there was no time; and suddenly, all at once, it began.

16. St Maximus the Confessor, *Lib. de Div. Nomin. Schol.*, V, 8; in *P.G.* 5, 336.

17. This relationship is vividly elucidated by St Augustine in his writing, *De Genesi ad lit.* V, 5; in *P.L.* 34, 325. «Factae itaque creaturae motibus coeperunt currere tempora: unde ante creaturam frustra tempora requiruntur, quasi possint inveniri ante tempora... potius ergo tempora a creatura, quam creatura coepit a tempore; utrumque autem ex Deo»; cf. *de Genesi c. manich.* I, 2; in *P.L.* 24, 174, 175; *de Circ. Dei*, XI; in *P.L.* 31, 312; quis non videat quod tempora non fuissent, nisi creatura fieret, quae aliquid aliqua mutatione mutaret; c. 322: procul dubio non est mudus factus in tempora, sed cum tempore; *Confess.* XI, 13; in *P.L.* 32, 815-816 et passim; cf. p. Duhem, *The System of the World*, Vol II, Paris, 1914, pp. 464ff.

18. G. Florovsky, *Creation and Creaturehood* in the collected works of G. Florovsky, «Creation and Redemption», Nordland Publishing Company, Belmont, Mass., 1976, Vol. III, pp. 43-44.

Creation springs, *comes into* being, passes from out of non-being into being. As St Gregory of Nyssa says, «it begins to be» and «the very substance of creation owed its beginning to change»¹⁹, the very transition from non-entity to existence is a change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power into being»²⁰.

This primordial genesis, as G. Florovsky affirms, and beginning of change and duration, this «transition» from void to existence, is inaccessible to human thought²¹. St Augustine used to say and to explain the issue of time, it is not time that precedes time, but «the height of ever-present eternity» transcending duration (*celsitudo semper praesentis aeternitatis*). So time began, but there will be a time when «there should be no more delay» (ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται) (*Rev* 10:6). St John of Damascus transfers the whole issue of time in relation to the Resurrection and affirms: «Time, after the Resurrection, will no longer be numbered by days and nights; rather, there will be one day without evening»²². There will be no time, but creation will be preserved. The created world can exist even not in time. Creation began but it will not cease²³. Time is a kind of line *segment*, with a beginning and an end. But in eternity there is neither change nor a beginning. The whole of temporality does not coincide with eternity. «The fulness of the times» (*omne tempus*) does not necessarily mean «always» (*semper*), as St Augustine has pointed out²⁴. But God «created all things that they might have their being» (*Wis. Solomon* 1:14). And not for the time being, but for ever did He create: He brought creation *into being* by His creative word. «For He hath established the world, so that is shall not be moved» (*Ps* 93:1).

19. St John of Damascus, *De fide Orth.* II, 1, in *P.G.* 94, 864.: «οὐδὲ γὰρ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἡμέραις καὶ νυξίν ὁ χρόνος ἀριθμῆσεται, ἔσται δὲ μᾶλλον μία ἡμέρα ἀνέσπερος».

20. Cf. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 29; in *P.G.* 31, 89-91: «καὶ ἤρκεται οὐ παύεται».

21. St Augustine, *De Civ. Dei.* XII, c. XV; in *P.L.* 29, 363-365.

22. Cf. St Augustine says that «it cries out that it has been created — it cries out that it did not create itself: [I] exist because I am created; and I was not before I came to be, and I could not issue from myself»; see his *Confessiones*, XI, 4; in *P.L.* 32, 812.

23. St Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* h. 1, n. 6; in *P.G.* 29, 16.

24. St Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. Cath. m.*, 6; in *P.G.* 14, 28; cf. St John of Damascus, *De fide Orth.* I, 3; in *P.G.* 94, 796: «for things whose being originated with a change are definitely subject to change, whether it be by corruption or by voluntary alteration».

The world exists. But it began to exist; and that means «the world could have not existed». There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world. Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent. In the created world itself there is no foundation, no basis for genesis and being. Creation by its very existence witnesses to and proclaims its creaturehood, it proclaims that it has been produced²⁵. By its very existence creation points beyond its own limits.

The cause and foundation of the world is outside the world. The world's being is possible only through the supra-mundane will of the merciful and almighty God who «calls the things into existence that do not exist» (*Rom 4:17*). Finally, unexpectedly it is precisely in its *creaturehood* and *createdness* that the stability and substantiality of the world is rooted.

But in creation something is *absolutely new*, an extra-divine reality is posited and built up. It is precisely in this that the supremely great and incomprehensible miracle of creation consists — that an «other» springs up, that heterogeneous drops of creation exist side by side with «the illimitable and infinite ocean of being», as St Gregory of Nazianzus described God²⁶. There is an infinite distance between God and creation, and this is a *distance of natures*²⁷. St Augustine said, in creation «there is nothing related to the Trinity, except the fact that the Trinity has created it»²⁸.

For the Fathers there is always an impassable limit in the relationship between God and creation which can always be perceived and revealed as the *living duality of God and creation*. St Makarios says: «He is God, and she is non-God, 'the Great' of the soul. He is the Lord, and she the handmaid; He the Creator, and she the creation; He the architect, and she the fabric; and there is nothing in common between Him and her nature»²⁹. What is created is outside of God, but is united with Him. The Fathers of the 4th century, moved by the Arian contro-

25. *Ibid.*, *De opif. hom.* 26, in *P.G.* 24, 184; cf. *Or. cath. m.*, 21; in *P.G.* 25, 57: «The very transition from non-entity to existence is a change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power in being». Since the origin of man comes about «through change» he necessarily has changeable nature.

26. St Gregory of Nazianzus., *Or.* 38, *In Theoph.*, 7; in *P.G.* 36, 317.

27. Cf. St. John of Damascus, *De fide Orth.* I, 13; in *P.G.* 96, 583.

28. St Augustine, *De Genesi ad lit.*, I, imp. C. 2: «non de Dei natura, sed a Deo sit facta de nihilo... quapropter creatura, universam neque consubstantiali Deo, neque coaeternam fas est dicere, aut credere», in *P.L.* 34, 221.

29. St Makarios of Egypt, *Hom. XLIX*, 4; in *P.G.* 34, 816.

versy to define the concept of creation in a clear and precise manner, stressed above all the heterogeneity of the created and Creator in counter-distinction to the «consubstantiality» of generation; and they corrected this heterogeneity with the dependence of creation upon the will and volition. Everything created, according to St Athanasius, «is not in the least like its Creator in substance, but is outside of Him», and therefore also could *not* have existed³⁰.

Creation «comes into being, made up from outside»³¹, and it is not a phenomenon, but a «substance». The reality and substantiality of created nature is manifested first of all in *creaturely freedom*. Freedom is not exhausted by the possibility of choice, but presupposes and starts with it, as G. Florovsky points out³². And creaturely freedom is disclosed first of all in the equal possibility of two ways: to God and away from God. This duality of ways is not a mere formal or logical possibility, but a real possibility, dependent on the effectual presence of powers and capacities not only for a choice between, but also for the following of, the two ways. Freedom consists not only in the possibility, but also in the *necessity* of autonomous choice, the resolution and resoluteness of choice. Without this autonomy, nothing happens in creation; and as St Gregory the Theologian says, «God legislates human self-determination»³³. Finally, the sole foundation of the world consists in God's freedom, in the freedom of love.

From Cosmogony to Theogony: The Newness of Creation.

The world was created by the will of God. It is of another nature than God. It exists outside of God, «not by place but by nature» as St John of Damascus affirms. These simple affirmations of faith open up a mystery as unfathomable as that of the diving being: the mystery of the created being, the reality of a being, external to any presence of God, free in relation to His omnipotence, having an interiority radically new in face of the trinitarian plenitude, in brief the reality of the *other-than-God*, the irreducible ontological density of the *other*.

On these fundamental principles is based the patristic theology which tries to analyse the doctrine of creation according to a new inter-

30. St Athanasius, *Contra Arian. Or.* 1, 20; in *P.G.* 26, 53.

31. *Ibid.*, *Or.* 2, 2; in *P.G.* 26, 152.

32. G. Florovsky, *op.cit.*, vol. III, Belmont, Mass., 1976. p. 44.

33. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 45 in *S. Pascha* 28; in *P.G.* 36, 661.

pretation which the Fathers link with the trinitarian dogma and the reality of the mystery of the divine God.

Christianity alone—or more precisely, the Judeo-Christian tradition—knows the notions of absolute creation. This is because Christianity does not have a philosophical school speculating on abstract concepts, but first of all a lively communion with God³⁴. Creation *ex nihilo* is a dogma of faith. It finds its first expression in the Bible, particularly in the second book of Maccabees (7:28) where a mother, exhorting her son to martyrdom, says to him: «Behold the heavens and the earth, and seeing all that is there, you will understand that God has created it from nothing» (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων—according to the translation of the Septuagint)³⁵. There is nothing remotely similar in other religions or metaphysics. Sometimes creation is said to begin with a possibility of being permanently open to demiurgic ordering: such was the prime matter of ancient thought which immutable being was said to inform. This matter does not exist in itself. It is a pure possibility of being, non-being certainly, but the «μὴ ὄν» which is not the absolute nothingness «οὐκ ὄν».

By reflection, it receives a certain verisimilitude, a precarious evocation of the world of ideas. Of such, in particular, is Platonic dualism, but also, with certain differences, the perpetual taking-of-form of matter in Aristotle.

Sometimes the Fathers encounter the idea of creation as a divine procession. God brings forth from his own being, often by a primordial polarization which gives rise to the multiform universe. On this understanding, as V. Lossky says, is manifestation or emanation of divinity³⁶. Such is the fundamental conception of India which we find again in the Hellenic world with gnosticism and to which the thought of Plotius, tending towards monism, is very close. Here *cosmogony* becomes *theogony*³⁷. The absolute becomes relative through stages of des-

34. V. Lossky, *Ocerk misticeskoe bogoslovie Vostocinoi Tzerkvi*, in: *Bogoslovskie Trudi*, Izdanie Moscovksoi Patriarhii, 1972, p. 26.

35. Here is its important to notice that «οὐκ» is a radical negation which, by contrast with the other adverb of negation «μὴ» leaves no room for doubt and that it is used here systematically against the rule of grammar, one can measure the total implication of the expression: God has not created starting from something, but starting with what is not, from «nothingness».

36. Cf. V. Lossky, *Dogmatic*; in *Messenger de l' Exarchat du Patriarche russe en Europe Occidental* 46-47 (1964), pp. 85-86.

37. See G. Limouris, *Anthropological and Soteriological Perspectives*, in: *Nicholas Cabasilas and his theological teaching, Strasbourg, France, 1983*, pp. 202-319.

ending «condensation». It manifests and downgrades itself in the universe. The world is a fallen God who strives to become God again. Its origin resides sometimes in a mysterious catastrophe which one may call the fall of God, sometimes in an inner necessity, in a strange cosmic passion where God seeks to assume consciousness of Himself, sometimes in a cyclic temporality of manifestations and re-absorption which seem to be imposed upon God Himself. In these two cases the idea of a creation *ex nihilo* does exist. For in Christianity matter itself is created. This mysterious matter which Plato said only mixed concepts could grasp, this pure possibility of being, is itself created, as St Augustine has remarkably well demonstrated.

Therefore, creation is a free act, a gratuitous act of God. It does not respond to any necessity of divine being whatever. Even moral motivations which are sometimes attributed to it are platitudes without importance: The God-Trinity is plenitude of love, It has no need of another to pour out Its love, since the other is already in it, in the «circumincision» of the hypostasis. God is therefore creator because He wishes it thus: the name of Creator is second in relation to the three names of the Trinity. God is eternally Trinity. Origin believed that He is not eternally Creator because He is prisoner of cyclic conceptions of antiquity, and therefore made Him dependent on the creature.

In creation, indeed, we recognize order, finality, love — all the very opposite of license. The qualities of God, which have nothing to do with our dissolute pseudo-liberty, here manifest themselves. The very being of God is reflected in the creature and calls it to share in His divinity. This call and the possibility of responding to it constitute for those who are within creation the only justification of the latter.

The creation *ex nihilo* is the work of the will of God. That is why St John of Damascus opposes it to the generation of the Word: «Since the generation», he says, «is a work of nature and proceeds from the very substance of God, it must be without beginning and eternal, for otherwise the begetting would be subject to change and there would be a God before and another God after; God would suffer increase. As for creation, it is the work of the will of God, therefore it is not co-eternal with God. For it cannot be that what is brought forth from nothingness could be co-eternal with that which exists without origin and always»³⁸.

38. St John Damascus, *De fide Orth.* II, 2; in *P.G.* 94. 865 A.

This work is contingent: God might not have created. But, contingent in relation to the very being of the Trinity, it imposes on created beings the necessity to exist, and to exist for ever: contingent for God, creation is necessary for itself, because God freely makes of the created being what it must be. Thus we can penetrate the mystery of the created being what it must be. Thus we can penetrate the mystery of the created being. To create is not to reflect oneself in a mirror, even that of prime matter, it is not vainly to divide oneself in order to take everything unto oneself. It is a calling forth of *newness*. One might almost say, as V. Lossky strongly affirms, a risk of newness³⁹. When God raises, outside of Himself, a new subject, a free subject, that is the peak of his creative act. Divine freedom is accomplished through creating the supreme risk: another freedom.

This «*newness*» of creation adds nothing, therefore, to the being of God. Our concepts proceed by juxtaposition, according to a «thingist» imagery, but one cannot add up God and the world. Thought must proceed here by analogy, in a manner designed to emphasize at once the relation and the difference; for the creature exists only in God, in this creative will which precisely makes it different from God, that is to say, makes it «creature». Creatures are poised on the creative word of God as on a diamond bridge; beneath the abyss of divine infinity, above the abyss of their own nothingness.

Providence and Creation.

The world was not created to be absolutely self-sufficient and independent; rather, it is of only relative independence, insufficient for the preservation, the integrity and development of its creatures without the «*synergeia*» — the assistance, the cooperation, of the providence of God. Hence, the good God did not abandon the world which He created to its own fate, but continues, through His providence, to care for it: preserving it, governing it, and directing it to its final purpose. For this reason, we do not only «confess God» as Creator, but «we understand that all are governed by His providence only»⁴⁰. God «not only having brought the universe into being, but preserving and shaping it... all visible and invisible creation enjoys His providence, without which (God's assistance and cooperation) they would cease to exist, would disappear, would be annihilated»⁴¹.

39. Cf. V. Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

40. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolykos* 111, 9; in *P.G.* 6, 1133.

41. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *On the Paralytic, Homily XII*, 4; in *P.G.* 43.

God's preservation and governance extend throughout the entire universe and to each being separately, so that, together with the cooperation of the divine power and providence with the natural and spiritual powers and laws of the universe, the plan of God is completed. Nothing in the entire universe happens by accident, unknown to the providence of God.

«Do not say anything comes automatically into being by itself. Nothing springs out of disorder, out of infinity, just by change. Nothing moves about the universe accidentally, or out of luck, having been brought about by some evil hour or moment. Such are but the imaginings of uncultured peoples. Nothing is without providence; nothing is neglected by God. The sleepless eye of God beholds all, is present everywhere, desiring the salvation of His own»⁴². But the divine providence, while cooperating when man does good, naturally does not cooperate at all when man, in his free choice, decides to work evil. Thus the divine providence becomes a «concession to free will»⁴³.

However, «we believe that all that exists, whether visible or unseen, is governed by the providence of God. As for evil events which occur, God foresaw them all and allows them to come about, but He does not cause them, for He is not the Creator of evil, but had intended all people and events for some good purpose, God being Himself absolutely good»⁴⁴.

Creation in Relation to Incarnation and Redemption.

G. Florovsky always used to affirm that the very fact of the Incarnation was usually interpreted in the perspective of redemption in early Christian theology⁴⁵. But this perspective had also a close relationship with the doctrine of creation, as far as the patristic theology has developed. It was generally assumed that the very meaning of

42. St Basil the Great, *Homily 32, 3 to Psalms*; in *P.G.* 29, 329; see also *Homily 7 to the Hexaemeron* 5; in *P.G.* 29, 160. Cf. St John Chrysostom, *For Hermanensis and Providence*; in *P.G.* 50, 749ff; Theodoretus of Cyrrhus, *On Providence*, in *P.G.* 83, 556ff.

43. St John Damascus, *De fide Orth.* II, 29; in *P.G.* 94, 964. Here the Father deals with the divine providence.

44. St Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession of Faith*, in J. Karmiris, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments*, vol. II, Athens, 1953, p. 749; see also J. Karmiris, *Confession of the Orthodox Faith by Dositheus the Patriarch of Jerusalem*, Athens, 1949, pp. 48-49 (in Greek).

45. G. Florovsky, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

salvation was that the intimate union between God and man (humankind) had been restored, and it was inferred that the Redeemer had to belong Himself to both sides, i.e. to be at once both divine and human, for otherwise the broken communion between God and humankind would not have been re-established. Several Fathers were in agreement with this line of reasoning as it was formulated by St Athanasius in his struggle with the Arians, by St Gregory of Nazianzus in his refutation of Apollinarianism and by other writers of the 4th and 5th centuries. As St Gregory of Nazianzus says, «that is saved which is united with God»⁴⁶. Therefore the redeeming aspect and impact of the Incarnation were emphatically stressed by the Fathers in general. The purpose and the effect of the Incarnation were defined precisely as the redemption of *man and his* restoration to those original conditions which were destroyed by the fall (πτῶσις) and sin (ἁμαρτία).

The sin of the world was abrogated and taken away by the Incarnate One, and the only, being both divine and human, could have done it. The problem of the relation between the mystery of the Incarnation and the original purpose of Creation was not touched upon by the Fathers, and they never elaborated this point systematically. «It may perhaps be truly said that the thought of an Incarnation independent of the Fall harmonizes with the general tenor of Greek theology. Some patristic phrases seem to imply that the thought was distinctly realized here and there, and perhaps discussed»⁴⁷.

St Maximus the Confessor seems to be the only Father who was directly concerned with the problem, although not in the same setting as the later theologians in the West⁴⁸. He stated plainly that the Incarnation should be regarded as an *absolute and primary purpose of God in the act of creation*. G. Florovsky says that the nature of the Incarnation, of this union of the divine majesty with human frailty, is indeed an unfathomable mystery, but we can at least grasp the reason and the purpose of this supreme mystery, its *logos* and *skopos*⁴⁹. But St Maximus, who first

46. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epist.* 101, *ad Cledonium*, in *P.G.* 37, 118.

47. B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel of Creation*, in: *The Epistles of St John. The Greek Text with notes and essays*, Macmillan, 1892, p. 288 (third edition).

48. With special reference to Duns Scotus followed by the majority of theologians of the Franciscan order, Francois de Sales and Malebrouiche, Bishop Westcott. Fr. Sergey Boulgakov was strongly in favour of the opinion that the Incarnation should be regarded as an absolute decree of God, prior to the catastrophe of the Fall, in *Agnets Bozhii*, Paris 1933, p. 191ff (in Russian).

49. Cf. G. Florovsky, *op.cit.*, p. 168.

briefly summarizes the true teaching about the Person of Christ, then proceeds: «This is the blessed end, on account of which everything was created. This is the Divine purpose, which was thought of before the beginning of creation, and which we call an intended fulfilment. All creation exists on account of this fulfilment and yet the fulfilment itself exists because of nothing that was created. Since God had this end in full view, he produced the natures of things. Through this there is a recapitulation to God of those created by Him».

For the Cappadocians, Incarnation and Redemption-salvation resulting from Christ constitutes an innovation for fallen human nature, which has not at all altered the *Logos*. The permanent desire of the Creator is that human nature, in its deep ontological nature, despite redemptive action, should remain the same. What must change is the «way» (*tropos*), how it exists and how it behaves in our daily life. This «way of being» (*tropos hyparxeos*) in Adam's humanity was dominated by the attraction of egoistic pleasure, and hence an individualisation, which splits humanity and leads it to corruption. On the contrary, in Christ Incarnate — fruit of «*philautia*» through «*γένεσις*» but of «*philantrophia*» through «*γέννησις*» — the same nature is established by the Person of Christ who made it his own, in the communion of love and in his divine liberty as Son; assuming the appearance of a slave in order to restore this likeness with the Father (*Phil* 2:7). This was realized by the acceptance even of death as the ultimate consequence of sin, by Christ who alone was without sin, but incorporated in flesh the pure love of God⁵⁰.

Therefore the Person of the Son, in assuming our humanity, communicates to his own personal «*hypotyposis*»⁵¹. Later, in the Church, through baptism, a sacramental life offers the opportunity to acquire this *hypostasis*, being reborn through the Church, recreated by the Spirit and taking a divine name, belonging to Christ and receiving his name. As Makarios the Egyptian says: «On account of God's infinite mercy he changes himself, enters into pious souls to be seen and share with them his blessing»⁵².

The whole history of Christological dogma was determined by this fundamental conception: the Incarnation of the Word as Redemption. In the Incarnation human history is completed; here we have

50. St Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 42, in *P.G.* 91, 1341.

51. *Ibid.*, *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 20; in *P.G.* 91, 1241.

52. St Makarios of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies* 4, 1.

the accomplishment of the whole creation. God's eternal will is accomplished, «the mystery from eternity hidden and to angels unknown». The days of expectation are over. The Incarnation of the Word was an absolute manifestation of God for his creation. And above all it was a revelation of life⁵³.

The mystery of the Cross begins in eternity, «in the sanctuary of the Holy Trinity, unapproachable for creatures». And the transcendent mystery of God's wisdom and love is revealed and fulfilled in history. Therefore this mystery is beyond our rational comprehension. The whole life of our Lord was one great act of forbearance, mercy and love. And the whole of it is illuminated by the eternal radiance of Divinity, though that radiance is invisible to the world of flesh and sin. But salvation is completed on Golgotha, not on Tabor, and the Cross of Jesus was foretold even on Tabor (cf. *Luke* 9:31).

The Incarnation is the quickening of man, as it were, the resurrection of human nature. «Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh» (*I Tim* 3:16). But God was not manifested in order to recreate the world at once by the exercise of His omnipotent might, or to illuminate and transfigure it by the overwhelming light of His glory. It was in the utmost humiliation that this revelation of Divinity was wrought. As St John of Damascus says in relation to Incarnation — Creation — Redemption in the Incarnation: «Three things were accomplished at once: the assumption, the existence, and the deification of humanity by the Word»⁵⁴. But the whole mystery of Incarnation finds its fulfilment in the Cross and in the Resurrection. The mystery of the Cross cannot be adequately presented in terms of the transaction or the ransom. If the value of the death of Christ was infinitely enhanced by His Divine Personality, the same also applies to the whole of His life. All His deeds have an infinite value and significance as the deeds of the Incarnate Word of God.

The Cross is not a symbol of justice, but the symbol of Love Divine. St Gregory of Nazianzus utters all these doubts with great emphasis in his remarkable Easter sermon⁵⁵. He tries to make clear the inexplicability of the Cross in terms of vindicatory justice. And he concludes: «From this it is evident that the Father accepted (the sacrifice),

53. Cf. St Ignatius, *Ephes.* VII, 2: «in death true life».

54. St John Damascus, *De fide Orth.* III, 12; in *P.G.* 94, 1032.

55. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 35, in *S. Pascha* 22; in *P.G.* 36, 653.

not because He demanded or had need, but by economy and because man had to be sanctified by the divinity of God»⁵⁶.

Redemption is not just the forgiveness of sins, it is not just man's reconciliation with his Creator and nature; but it is the abolition of sin altogether, the deliverance from sin and death. And finally Redemption was accomplished on the Cross, «by the blood of his cross» (*Col* 1:20; cf. *Acts* 20:28; *Rom* 5:9; *Eph* 1:7; *Col* 1:14; *Heb* 9:22; *I John* 1:7; *Rev* 1:5-6.9). In the Cross the new creation appears glorified and transfigured, and it becomes the source of our resurrection. This new creation celebrates God's manifestation on the earth and opens new horizons for reconciliation. The whole cosmos is ready to receive this «new creation» only with justice and peace and unity of humankind. Humanity becomes therefore a receiver of the «new heaven and the new earth», which tries to be transformed into a new reality, where the Incarnation is the centre of it and the victory of the Incarnate Lord over death and sin. The world is expecting this new transformation; we are still on the way to the age of hope and expectation. The ultimate consummation will close for the whole human race at once⁵⁷.

This is the goal of the creation: to become a *new creation* in a *new world*, in a transfigured world, where only by peace and justice God's plan and will can accomplish humankind's liberation and salvation (theosis).

The Church - macrocosmos and creation.

No theology or ecclesiology is possible, particularly in regard to church and world, if one neglects to look at the world as a whole, created and supported by God and fulfilled in his creation. The Church, whose essence is the divinehuman fulness of life in the Holy Spirit, represents the *macrocosmos* of the whole creation. Its unity in Christ reflects the unity of the «cosmos» created by God. In Christ and his body, the Church, of which He is the head, everything was created and reconciled (*Col.* 1:16-21). In the Church and in the Church's life in the Spirit and its preaching to the world, everything is restored, and has been restored, and can be restored in its full meaning as the creation of God. But it is only in Christ and in His Church that this vision becomes a reality,

56. *Ibid.*

57. There is only one exception. «The grave and death were not able to hold back the *Theotokos*, who is ever-watchful in prayers» (Kontakion on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin).

and the creation, with its essence and purpose in God, is revealed as bearing the marks of the divine powers of creation out of love for the sake of the further creative powers of man in freedom.

The fall of man cannot provoke a definite rupture between God and his creation, if one looks at creation, not through the eyes of one whose thoughts are fed by the splendour of the natural revelation, but whose life is sanctified, regenerated and restored by the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Church and creation is always the theme *par excellence* of a true ecclesiology because out of that theme the unity of origin, essence and scope of the act of God and of the whole world is not simply preserved in our minds — our theories are not needed for that! — but this theory is incarnated in and among us as the Church. We are thus the people of God through whom and with whom the whole world is brought into the union of the fulness of all in all (*Eph* 1:23) into the gathering together of all things which are in heaven and on earth. An ecclesiology in ecumenical perspective, ready to conceive of the wholeness of the grace of God for the wholeness of the Gospel, has to be preached to the whole world, has to recognize one of the main subjects, if not the first and the last one, as being the careful examination of the relationship between Church and creation, following the biblical text and the inner life of the Church. Due to the abuse of the scholastic attitude regarding the autonomy of natural revelation, a falsified and polemic tradition has provoked the rejection of the ecclesiological and pneumatological understanding of the unbroken unity of the act of the divine creation in the logos of God and the regeneration through the energy of the Holy Spirit in the Church for the whole of creation.

Greek patristic thought of the one undivided Church never accepted theology on the basis of natural revelation, either to create an autonomous aspect of the revelation of God outside the Church or as a break within the act of God in creation — once this act is seen through the Pentecostal event of the establishment of the Church as the body of Christ in space and time in this world. The problem here is very delicate and important (significant) because it is not enough to submit that only through Christ the whole of creation can be brought back into its unity. This Christomonism which refers to the once-and-for-all event of the redemption does not correspond to the fulness of the creation, redemption and regenerating act of the Trinitarian God in His creation. The pneumatological-ecclesiological dimension completes the Christomonistic view of the revelation between God and His creation,

and affirms the human, the secular, the world's audition, which exists permanently in time by and in the Church and in the Holy Spirit.

Church and Culture in Relation to Creation.

Following these fundamental principles which direct the mind towards a positive contemplation and a deep theological evaluation of the reality of this world, and of the human freedom at the heart of it, ecclesiology embraces human culture within its immediate region of interest. There is not only a religious - theological understanding of culture but a strictly ecclesiological one since the Church, as the divine event *par excellence* in the creative plan and act of God, is the concrete and all - englobing reality in history, replacing abstract religious «Weltanschauung» and theological speculation. The ecclesiology conceived through the Church, even only on the basis and experience of new life in the Spirit, looks at culture through the origin of creation in the hands of the Creator and its scope in the fulfilment of His creation in Christ and His Church by the Spirit. Culture can be defined as the act of man in response to God. It is an act through which man actualises the particular gifts received from God to constitute him as a free man. Through culture man proves that he is created by God out of his love, manifested in the freedom of his Holy Spirit which is acting in man. Christ incarnates in him all in all by being this realized act of God in fallen sinful man. But through the redemption by Christ, the Spirit brings again creative power and restores the gift of divine freedom in man, and he no longer has the autonomous and thus Satanic freedom of separation. Human creative power in its authentic context and form is possible only after, in and through the Church event of Pentecost⁵⁸.

Culture is the result, the form, the appearance of this creative power of man in the name of the Creator. God repeats and manifests the scope, the fulfilment of His creation in the Church and sanctifies, restores and regenerates culture in its relationship with Him as Creator.

58. P. Tillich writes: «Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. Briefly: Religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion. Such a consideration definitely prevents the establishment of a dualism of religion and culture» in: *Theology of Culture*, New York, 1959, p. 42. If this is true, then a Christian has to bring the consequences of that into the concrete understanding of religiosity in the Church and through the Church and speak of «ecclesiological understanding of culture».

Through culture, therefore, man first justifies his divine origin as being a free existence, but in communion with God, not independent and without relation. Secondly, man understands himself in Christ as sharing in him the restoration of the whole world. Man, by his action as a responsible being in this world, shares the fulfilment and the process towards the fulfilment of the whole creation in Christ Jesus. And thirdly, he transcends by his culture the limits of space, of matter, of finite time and corruption, thus sharing the foretaste of eternal life in the Holy Spirit.

This strictly ecclesiological understanding of culture seems to exclude all expression of culture outside the Christian era. This would be an entirely false conclusion. Culture cannot be absent or dead outside the church of before the incarnation of Christ. But this is another culture. It may be of apparently higher importance for the sinful, fallen man than that which is understood in its ecclesiological significance. The beauty of technology, the harmony of music, designs and colours, the system of philosophical thought, the moral codes — all this can be, according to the secular world's standard, independently conceived outside the Church as the remnants of the divine creation of fallen man. The external movement, the harmony (the splendour of Greek classicism!) can constitute an autonomous realm manifesting the wrong and profane maintenance of this world outside its creation, not through communion but in independence and autonomy. It is a purely human culture, we must admit that. It is also the result of the divine creation; we must confess that, too. The origin is this. But the heart, the life, its incarnate «logos» as life, is no longer there. This culture is doomed to corruption and therefore leads to destruction. It springs out of the freedom of independence from the creator.

The ecclesiological approach to culture gives it its heart, through its pleroma in Christ and its scope in the Spirit. It expresses this fulfilment and leads to the pleroma of the end, moved and animated by this end. It is a doxological hymn⁵⁹ to a continuous thanksgiving, a further incarnation of the grace of God by his spirit in us and amongst us. This culture springs out of a freedom of communion through and with the energy of the Trinitarian God⁶⁰.

59. Cf. the eucharistic anaphora of the Divine Liturgy in expressing this truth.

60. Cf N. Nissiotis, *The Ecclesiological Foundation of Mission*, in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 7 (Summer 1961/Winter 1962) nos. 1/2, pp. 50-51.

The World in Mutation in the Contemporary Situation.

Humanity today is accustomed to living in a world where «Christianity is dead» and where the Christian world, with its all-embracing character, no longer exists. What attitude is to be adopted by the Church towards a secularized world or how is the Church to relate to this new situation?

The upheavals of the last thirty years in the economic, social, cultural, and political fields have been profound. We have tasted the «bitter fruits» of abundance after a period of development unique in history. The society of abundance that the world has been seeking so ardently that it has been ready to make *any* sacrifice has been achievable only at a price that many —especially the young— consider exorbitant. Far from being the society envisaged by Engels and the idealists of all breeds who held that, at the economically advanced stages of society, all would be able to enjoy the leisure enjoyed only by the rich in feudal or Renaissance society, the achievement of constant growth in material welfare has called for all the forces of society to be directed towards this objective.

The search for continual growth in the means of producing consumption goods has forced countries to create bureaucratic structures and extremely advanced but highly demanding production systems whose operation makes it necessary «to lose one's life while earning one's livelihood» as people mockingly describe it today.

The securing of these goods is not enough in itself: one must be able to enjoy, use, or consume them and for this one needs time. Now while it is possible to multiply the quantity of goods on a vast scale, there is no question of prolonging the time available for consuming them. Real plenty is not of this world, for scarcity is the sign of death.

Paradoxically, therefore, the pursuit of plenty which was expected to free humanity from its material anxieties and enable it to devote itself to the activities of the mind of spirit has reduced it to a state of slavery and dependency that have made the self-realization which is the starting-point for one's inner life even more difficult. Assaulted and solicited from all sides by the volatile media, often in despair and terribly alone, uprooted from the life of the family and native soil — these are the characteristics of the human being produced by the society of abundance.

The transformation of the world has also been spectacular in the ethical field. The last thirty years have seen urbanization lead to the

dissolution of the family nucleus and to the disappearance of the local community with its human side that enabled the individual to integrate with society.

If the Church does not receive the world into itself but keeps aloof from it, it ceases to be the living Body of Christ and is only a body in the legal sense of an institutionalized organization condemned to death by *inanity*, lack of life, to a *historic aphasia*. In this case the Church survives as an isolated sect or conventional institution with an anthropocentric religiosity incapable of bringing life.

On the other hand, if the Church accepts the world submissively; it is no longer the living body of Christ but a worldly object — it betrays its own life, its own identity. A Church submitting to the secularization of the world that it was designed to transform deteriorates; it can no longer respond to the profound, existential craving of humanity. It becomes an ideology, or an emotional mystique, or a utilitarian morality restricted to «improving» the surface of life, morals, or the social or political situation. It is unable to transform life. If we accept that the role of Church is not the superficial «improvement» of the *fall of humankind*, of the existential tragedy of humanity, but the dynamic transformation of life; the achievement of a salvation that genuinely destroyed death and despair, we must explore more deeply the reality of the life that the Church's truth represents. The Church's truth is not a metaphysical or «religious» theory or a moral rule; it is a world of *existence* radically different from the mortal existence of individuals in the natural state. The Church's mode of existence presupposes the dynamic transformation of individuals into persons, and «person» means the *hypostasis* of life, life in common, *koinonia* of love; in the image of our existential prototype which is the Holy Trinity, God who is love.

Personal existence, austerity and the liberty of love is for the Church the only definition of Being; the only possibility of a life beyond the conception and natural conditions of the individual. This definition of Being as eternal life is not an emotional mystique but a real event, the ecclesial fact of the ecclesiastic assembly, personal participation in the ecclesial community, the communion of saints.

The Church experiences the transfiguration of the creation and humankind in the liturgical space and time dimensions. Hence its true nature was symbolized by the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. In that experience at Tabor, the prefiguration of liturgical space and time, the restoration of nature to the true relationship: the immediacy of the relation, the a-dimensional proximity of Christ and communion

with Him, the participation in the truth and in the glory of God define the space dimension. At the same time the assembly's space is the a-dimensional gathering of the faithful in the unity of the life of the world which becomes the place of personal union of the created and the uncreated, the body and blood of Christ. The eucharist is the moment in the life of the Church when the anticipation of the *eschata* occurs. The *anamnesis* of Christ must be understood not a mere repetition of a past event but as an «*anamnesis*» of the future, as an eschatological event. In the Eucharist the Church becomes the reflection of the eschatological community of Christ the Messiah, an image of the trinitarian life of God. In terms of human existence this means mainly one thing: the transcending of all natural and social divisions that maintain the world in a state of disintegration, fragmentation, decomposition and therefore death.

All cultures in one way or another include elements which are meant to be transcendent. If the Church in its localization fails to present a transcendental image of the Kingdom, it is not the Church. Similarly, if the eucharistic gathering fails to provide such an image, it is not a eucharist in the true sense.

On the other hand, it is in the Eucharist that the communion reaches its culmination, humanity finds true life — the life that is in accord with his authentic being and acting. One's body is in the Eucharist united with the Body of Christ, blood with blood, soul with soul, will with will, desire with desire, thinking with thinking, for in the Eucharist one does not receive something from Christ, one receives Christ Himself. Thus a person received into the Church by baptism and moved by the chrismation becomes fully real and alive, and in the new light brought into the world by the rising of the real Sun of the world, the individual can exist, live and perform his or her task of proclaiming the good news of the Dawn and working for the enlightenment of the world.

The Lord has placed the Church *in* the world and given it an apostolic mission of witness and evangelization. But this is only the beginning of the mission, the magnitude of which calls for an inversion of the terms, i.e. for an effort to glimpse its completion and to picture *the world in the Church*, which involves a precise evaluation of human creation and culture.

There is an interpenetration of history and eschatology. The one exists in the other. The significance of Pentecost with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the universal implications of the epiclesis — parti-

culary in relation to the *eschaton and parousia* — are described by St Maximus the Confessor as follows: «(The basic vocation of Christians is) to unite created Nature (the world) with the uncreated deifying energy (of which the Church is the source)»⁶¹. The Church in the world qualifies time and existence by the *eschaton*, a process that judges all existence as closed, turned back upon itself, and thus formulates the priestly vocation of the world itself. The world does not become the Church but becomes harmonious with the Church, «without confusion or separation», and fulfils its own task by means of its own charisma.

There is no ontological dualism of the Church and the world, of the sacred and the profane. The dualism is ethical: that of «the new person» and «the old person», the sacred (redeemed) and the profane (demonized). According to the Church Fathers, the individual, is a *microcosm* but the Church is a macroanthropos. It is the Church's cosmic and pan-human dimension which by means of the *diaconia*, of which the archetype is the Good Samaritan, enables it to bridge the chasms and to eliminate all separation (emancipation, secularization and on the other hand Nestorianism or Monophysitism) while retaining the distinction of the vocations. The world in its way enters the *macroanthropos* of the Church, it is the site of the *apocatastasis*, the sphere of the *parousia* and the «new world» in power and strength.

God the Creator is present in the world in a *different way* from that in which He is present in His Body. The Church has to make explicit the implicit presence: to do what St Paul did in Athens when he decoded the inscription «To the unknown God» by naming Jesus Christ. The work of evangelization must permeate the work of civilization and guide it towards Christ. The church Fathers attacked the Gnostics for their rejection of earthly life. God is not totally aloof from the world but is Emmanuel - «God with us»; this is why «the whole waiting creation aspires to the revelation of the Son of God».

A baptized person is not different from the world but is simply its truth. The world is a royal gift to humankind as soon as the horizontal finds its vertical coordinate, and, in the words of a Latin American theologian «the world is an arena for the historical realization of the the kingdom of God»⁶².

61. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Treasure* 5, p. 6 75, 65-68.

62. L. Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*, London, SCM Press, 1985, p. 1.

The Church in, with and for the World.

Orthodoxy always insists on the ecclesiological premises before making any other christological statement about relations between the Church and the world. Here two comments are necessary and may seem positive at first sight, but that is because of the dualist vision which believers find in the biblical world.

First, one must never separate the Church from the world and say (for example) that Christ is much more present in the world than in the Church, or criticize the Church for «imprisoning Christ's work» within the limits of a historical community.

All these expressions indicate a false ecclesiology neglecting the cosmic aspect of the Church and its transcendental character in relation to human history. Moreover, the Church is reduced to being only a small flock of sinful men and women doomed to constant failure, failing to see Christ as its head, united by the Spirit to his body, and continuously effecting the union of all and everything in God. Hence any solidarity with the world must be based on a very broad ecclesiological foundation of what is represented by the creative work of the Holy Spirit, creator and engenderer of the world, made visible by local church and the ecclesial community embracing all humanity. The Spirit, moreover, has always been present in the creation and in the world. It has never ceased to operate by its charisma for the renewal and development of all humanity, but from the time of Pentecost and by virtue of the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection, it operates prophetically on behalf of God in a way that is special but decisive for human history through the historical community created by God and the gathering of all humanity into communion with the living God, i.e. the Church. By saying this, we are not imprisoning the Spirit but on the contrary are announcing the news that the Spirit can now spread the Word of God to the ends of the earth, so uniting all in a family which is the world redeemed and brought into communion with the living God.

Hence we can speak of the whole world as the body of Christ in a family awaiting the second coming of its creator. The Orthodox position has nothing in common with a speculative mysticism unrelated to the realities of this world and the human condition. On the contrary, this ecclesiology provides us with the premises for a very open and positive attitude towards reality, and it avoids the separation of the sacred from the profane, of the Church from the world. Solidarity and the Christian's active cooperation with the world are thereby pro-

vided with a firm foundation not depending on an abstract love of humanity or on sociological concepts, but emanating from the very essence of a much more profane interpretation of what the Church is as the means of Christ's salvation created for all and given to all by the Spirit of communion.

On the other hand, the Orthodox Tradition emphasizes the soteriological and prophetic aspect of ecclesial life, thus maintaining a clear distinction between human works and the special call addressed by God through Christ and implemented without interruption by the Holy Spirit in the historical community. The dualist vision of the world according to the Bible implies for the Orthodox an obligation to preserve the prophetic character of the Word of God. No humanism, no philanthropic work for the well-being of humanity, no progress of technical civilization and of a particular culture, can diminish or take the place of this prophetic character.

The climax of relations between the Church and the world is also reached at the anthropological level. Every manifestation of solidarity inspired by a total cosmic ecclesiology leads to emphasis on the value of the human person as renewed and transformed by the Church and as part of the world together with other persons.

Every ecclesiological theory and every worldly reality in practice takes concrete form in the human individual, and it is the individual believer who makes manifest directly the solidarity of the Church with the world. Thus, the picture is one of the Church present and active in the world, on the one hand, and of the world with its denial of God and the evil that always plays its destructive role in God's constructive plan. In this perspective, solidarity with the world is validated by the actual experience of each member of the Church. It is via this life of the believer that the Church is *in*, *with* and *for* the world, but at the same time the world is in the Church and in it earthly sin makes its most striking appearance. Hence, Orthodox spirituality underlies any notion of solidarity with the world and is always eminently realistic and without superficial emotionalism. This phenomenon of spirituality has nothing to do with certain individual attitudes of rigid conservatism and otherworldliness which deny the reality of the world and encourage contemplation via a form of monasticism that is not a genuine expression of the authentic Orthodox mentality. Monasticism and the contemplative life are for the Orthodox simply a sign of the end of history and of the eschatological dimension of the Church inaugurated in time by arrival of the Paraclete. Monasticism is a vivifying liturgical presence of

continuous prayer and doxology that humanity addresses to the work of Christ while awaiting the Second Coming in glory.

«The anthropological aspect arising out of the Church's relation to the world, seen through Orthodox spirituality, stressed the existential and dynamic side of a solidarity between Church and world. Each of us, insofar as he is able to reincarnate the proper relation between Christ and the world by the Holy Spirit, manifests this solidarity perfected and practiced between Church and world.

The Church never separates itself from the concrete person of the Christian: it is not a juridical institution or a spiritual authority separated from the actual and difficult life of the person in the world, of the human being who is a sinner by nature but who, now a believer, is on the way incognito towards transfiguration even in this world. It is natural that any theory of the relation between Church and world or of the Church's solidarity with the world should run against the ambivalence of the world and of human history.

The Church cannot pronounce itself publicly and universally on political, social and family problems in an absolute, global manner valid for all time. This does not mean that the Church, on the basis of the Bible and its life continually renewed in each epoch, has no answer and cannot provide help for Christians and non-Christians in all circumstances.

The Church can and must be present and assist in social and economic transformation, work of the restoration of social justice and peace, the integrity of creation and preservation of peace in the world. It will never cease, even in the most developed societies, to work on new developments and to create personalities before God who are conscious of their responsibilities as members of their societies and of humanity in the image of Christ. The prophetic word of God, if authentically preached and applied, is a pacific but dynamic revolution in any society. It is not there merely to bring the message of salvation to demonstrate existentially that it is the world transfigured. In the light of Christ's resurrection and transfiguration, which are the beginning of the new creation, and on the firm and lasting basis of its historical existence, the Church must continuously transform itself in the world without losing its character and identity.

Conclusion.

May I conclude by saying that Christians of today should think deeply about their task and diakonia to God's salvific plan of how to

preserve creation and keep it in its integrity; they should avoid all powers which try to destroy it, but they must also struggle for justice and peace, for the renewal of humanity and the world. Thus the Orthodox understanding of creation and its integrity in the world crisis of today is not limited to preserve creation because of its divine origin, but rather to contribute at all levels to glorify creation and to make it more useful, fruitful and prosperous for a new creation in which God is present with His Son and Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the doctrine of creation and its integrity is an issue that should also preoccupy Orthodox churches in their struggle for peace and justice in the world. Peace and justice should not be isolated from the creation concern because all should cooperate in a coherent manner. They complement each other and together they find their fulfilment in that «all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell» and «all things whether on earth or in heaven» be reconciled (*Col 1:19-20*).