

***PANTOKRATOR, the Cosmic Christ: A Christian Theology of Nature***

Sermons at Evensong in Lent 2004

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“I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh” (*Genesis* 9.15).

This series of six sermons beginning on Quinquagesima and concluding on Passion Sunday aims to bind together the readings from Holy Scripture set for Pre-Lent and Lent so as to uncover the forgotten teaching of the Church concerning the relations of nature, humanity, and God. The sermons will draw on the lections set for the Eucharist, Matins, and Evensong during this season.

In Lent the Church travels from the origin not only of creation (“In the Beginning God” *Genesis* 1) but also from the origin of all origination, the begetting of the Son within the Trinity itself (“In the beginning was the Word” *John* 1). It ends in the peace of the new Jerusalem (“a new heaven and a new earth” *Revelation* 21), the reunion of nature, humanity, and God. After the human enters this journey, the primal harmony of the Paradisal Garden is broken, cosmos and humanity divide. At Evensong this year we enter by contemplation the descent of Christ, prefigured in Joseph, into the world so as “to preserve life,” and the going-down of God’s people Israel into Egypt. Then we represent His and our ascent again by way of the lifting up of Jesus on his cross. In fact, however, this is not just a human story. The Christ who preserves life is cosmic: “It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven” *Colossians* 1.19 - 20).

The anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of the Christianity of the last two centuries causes us to forget the cosmic and trinitarian motion within which the Church sets the human story: “The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth; ... the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together” (*Romans* 8.19-22). “His dear Son ... is the firstborn of every creature, for by him were all things created ... and by him all things consist” (*Colossians* 1.13-17). The effect of this forgetfulness is a Christianity which fails to convey the reconciliation effected by the Christ. The incarnate eternal Word is the head of all creation, the Pantokrator. The culture produced by this false Christianity is an arrogant imperial domination of nature bringing death to all. By penitent reading and meditation on the Scripture the Holy Spirit in the Church has set for us, we shall attempt to remember “that God was in Christ reconciling” all things to Himself and “giving unto us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 *Corinthians* 5. 18-19).

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QUINQUAGESIMA: "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD,...IN HIM WAS LIFE."

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... All things were made by him ... In him was life and the life was the light ... .” (*John* 1)

When Phineas Stewart comes to visit, he has two uses for wooden sticks he may find: either, with a toothpick as baton, he conducts an imaginary string orchestra in which his father and I are the principal players, required to perform the Hymn to Joy, or, with a larger rod carried above his head, he processes solemnly across the room while singing. Although still less than three years old, Phineas is enacting something essential to religion which he has picked up from the ritual at St. George’s: we are on a journey, a journey which is represented and enabled by what the Church proclaims and enacts from Septuagesima to Easter. We are “running a race ... to obtain an incorruptible crown,” (*I Corinthians* 9) as St. Paul told us two Sundays ago; we are being changed by knowledge and love so that we shall see God “face to face [and] ... know even as we are known” (*I Corinthians* 13) as he tells us today, supporting the great summons of our Lord: “Behold we go up to Jerusalem” (*Luke* 18). The journey is to the community of peace and friendship, in which as St Anselm puts it “we shall love God more than ourselves and one another as ourselves, and God will love us more than we do ourselves; for we shall love God and ourselves and one another through God, and God will love himself and us through himself.” (*Proslogion* c. 25). Christians believe that the community of peace is established only in God and by God through his union with us. For this reason St George’s Church, in which Phineas is in imagination and fact walking up the aisle, moves always to “Jesus.”

Far more sumptuously, more elaborately, more awesomely, and with infinitely more explanation, the great abbey Church built by Norman kings and Benedictine monks at Monreale in Sicily proclaims the same. Over its Eastern apse, pointed to Jerusalem, the place of the rising sun, of pilgrimage, and of resurrection presides: “**IESUS CRISTOS O PANTO KRATOR**, Jesus Christ the All Powerful.” The Church names Jesus with the same title given to the Father by the Jews of Alexandria in their Greek translation of the Old Testament. This Jesus is the Cosmic Christ, the Eternal Word, the Son begotten by the Father as his equal, and because of this equality “Almighty, **O PANTO KRATOR**,” the Creator of all things. The creative Word shows us from the open Gospel he stretches out to us that he is the light of every journey. The text in Greek and Latin proclaims: “I am the light of the **KOSMOU** (cosmos), what follows me shall not circle around in darkness” (*John* 8.12)

Other icons of the Almighty Christ in neighbouring churches help us to interpret what we see at Monreale. Further along the northern coast of Sicily at Cefalù, the Gospel held by the *Pantokrator*, who again dominates gigantically from the apse, completes the text from John so as to associate life and light: “I am the light of the **KOSMOU** (cosmos), what follows me shall not circle around in darkness but shall have the light of life”: Christ is “the light of the cosmos” and “the light of life.”

Down from the Royal Mountain (“Monreale” is the Italian “Montréal”) in the city of Palermo herself, the Chapel of the Royal Palace is again dominated by *Christos Pantokrator*, this time depicted in the cupola. There Jesus Christ is encircled by these words from the Prophet Isaiah (66.1) connecting him to the heavens and the earth: “**OUTWS LEGEI KURIOS PANTOKRATOR O OURANOS MOI QRONOS H DE GH UPOPODION TWN PODWN MOU**, The Lord Pantokrator says: ‘The heaven is my throne, the earth is the footstool of my feet.’”

What Monreale does not spell out explicitly in words it demonstrates vividly step by step in mosaic: on the south wall, the same Christ who presides over the apse performs the whole day-by-day work of creation described in *Genesis*. Where we would expect to see God the Father creating, we see instead his Word Jesus Christ making the cosmos, a making which begins with the creation of Light: FIAT LUX: “Let there be light.” Christ is the cosmic Light which brings forth light and life, who sustains all life, and guides all life by his light drawing it into the order and purpose which Providence ordains for each and for the whole. In his acts of creation, Christ is always depicted with a scroll rolled up in his hand, the eternal blueprint, the forms, species, and ideas conceived in him as the “manifold wisdom” and “eternal purpose” of God (*Ephesians* 3.10-11). Having finished the work of the Six Days by making man in his image, it is Christ Pantokrator who rests. Christ the Almighty gently leads Adam by hand into the Garden of Paradise, commands him in respect to the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Christ fashions Eve from Adam’s side, then, taking her by his hand leads her to Adam. After the original couple have eaten of the fatal tree, Christ Pantokrator confronts them with their self-conscious nakedness: he is also judge of those who defy the cosmic order.

Again and again here, and in thousands of other icons of the **PANTOKRATOR** far earlier and far later than these in Sicily, we are taught the same truth: the Christ whose judgement we expect trembling, the Saviour for whose resurrection we hope as our destiny and our final end, is also the absolute Beginning of all, the Word spoken in the Beginning by which the Beginning created, the Word who was in the Beginning with God and was God. In the *Apocalypse* (21) Jesus proclaims: “I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the beginning and the end.” In Christ, the beginning and the end meet. The icon of the Pantokrator, the Scripture, which starts in *Genesis*, the book of the becoming, and ends in “the new heavens and the new earth” of the book of the *Apocalypse of St John the Divine*, and the Hellenic philosophy out of which the Church developed the doctrine of the creative Word, all three: icon, Scripture, and philosophy, teach the same. Icon, Scripture, and philosophy declare, as T.S. Eliot puts it: “In my beginning is my end” (*East Coker*), and “The End is where we start from” (*Little Gidding*). But, more deeply and more significantly than Eliot, all three: icon, Scripture, and philosophy proclaim that everything, the heavens and the earth, human life and all life, all, **PANTA**, begins in the Beginning. All is made both by going out to independence from its being in that Beginning, and by returning again into the Beginning by conformity to the nature, order, and purpose established there everlastingly. All comes to be in the Light which is the knowing of God, all shines forth and are seen in his Light, and are led by the Light back into the source of all illumination.

Why do I stress the *in*? The *in* of these phrases is crucial. To explain why, let me sketch the context in which I speak to you.

This series of sermons is intended to revive one of the most ancient practices of the Lenten season: the preaching of sermons on the Six Days of Creation. Because, from the most ancient times, the Church read the *Book of Genesis* in this season, and because there is nothing more appropriate to its disciplines than considering how we are placed in the Creation and ought to act as creatures, the greatest intellectual spirits in both the Greek and the Latin churches preached the *Hexaemeron*, the work of the Six Days, in Lent. The aim of the series which we are beginning this evening is to recover the doctrine taught by the ancient and medieval church in Lent, the doctrine of the Creative Word, the Word in which all things are, in which they have life, are sustained in life, and have purpose.

I shall assume throughout these sermons that I do not need to explain why we humans generally, and we Western imperial humans particularly, must now urgently reflect on, repent of, and reform how we stand to the natural order. Among us God's creation is on the edge of an apocalypse made by humans: every other of the living creatures God made and placed with us in the heavens and the earth is threatened by the killing which is our manner of living—if they have not been decimated or exterminated already; heaven and earth and what they yield are so poisoned by the excremental filth of our endless consumption that they are becoming barren, diseased, or monstrous; at a reckless and ever increasing pace we are exhausting the treasures stored in earth and water by millennia; we seem on the border (if we have not crossed it already) of so wrecking the system in which our natural cosmos consists and holds together here that most life will be destroyed on this planet. And we do all this according to a system of power in which most people on God's earth are impoverished while we Western Christians live in a morally, physically, and spiritually self-destructive and ever expanding luxury.

What help is the doctrine of the *Pantokrator*? It seems to be at the heart of the problem rather than of the solution. After all, the imperial regime dominating and destroying the human and the natural has been constructed by we Western Christians, the Superpower among us is the most faithfully church attending of nations, and virtually the only one which remains self-consciously Christian. Its Presidents offer prayer and blessing as the national Pontiffs. Moreover, and most importantly for us here tonight beginning these reflections on the *Book of Genesis*, a strong case can be made that what the Bible teaches is the most fundamental problem. Apparently its understanding of nature and our relation to nature has made us Christians so cosmically destructive. In the *Bible* God seems to exist before and outside the natural cosmos, he creates it by a command which might equally destroy it, as *Psalms* 102 puts it "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hand; they shall all wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou change them." Man is made as the image of this external, almighty, arbitrary dominator. Everything else God made is at human disposition, its value is only that of the useful for us; humans are to "multiply" upon the earth and to "subdue" it. There are a couple of moderating commands about "replenishing" and "tending," but they are by no means prominent, and we have certainly forgotten them. Thus it may be argued that

because Christians have enacted the God-imitating dominance the Bible teaches, and urged by Scripture, have reduced all other life to means for human consuming, that we Christians have brought death upon us all.

In fact, however, this representation of what Scripture teaches is recent and is not the old Trinitarian doctrine of the Church. The key to that old teaching which we shall be trying to remember in these most desperate of present circumstances lies with the “in” of which I spoke above: All (*PANTA*) becomes through Christ the Divine Word, in him was life (*John*1), “In him all fullness dwells” (*Colossians* 1.19). Indeed, “in him all things hold together,” or better, “are made a cosmic system, **ta panta en autwi sunesthken**” (*Colossians*1.17). The great old rule of Christian doctrine at work here is that “what the saviour does not contain he cannot redeem.”

This comes out strongly, if paradoxically, at Cefalù. There a border around the top of the Pantokrator explains: “+ FACTUS HOMO FACTOR HOMINIS FACTIQUE REDEMPTOR + IUDICO CORPOREUS CORPORA CORDA DEUS +.” It is not really translatable in English but a partial rendition would be: “God is made man who having been made is the Maker of the man he has been made. As a bodily Redeemer, human and divine, of the man I have been made, I judge bodily beings and hearts.” **Maker and Made, the Created Creator, the bodily Redeemer of bodies, the God-Man: the Divine life and light is not an external arbitrary dominator; all life is in him and from him and all life is sustained because he is its innermost being.** All is in him and when it comes forth he remains its sustaining, ordering, and guiding light. Remember the Gospel proclamation he holds out to our vision: “I am the light of the cosmos, what follows me shall not circle around in darkness but shall have the light of life.” Light of the cosmos, light of life: He makes himself to be a creature among his creatures and the Creator dies for all. I remember being told at seminary by theologians smug in Western existentialist superiority that the weakness of the old doctrine is that it forces God to die for tulips. It is time to wipe the self-centred sneer off our human faces. Forgetting that the Almighty Creator dies for his cosmos, we shall destroy it and ourselves with it.

**The Creator of all is the one who dies for his cosmos, the whole order he made, the order which consists in him:** at Monreale the *Pantokrator* who makes each and every of the works of the Six Days is crowned by the halo of his cross. The friendship, the holding together, established by his cross is in and for and between all creation. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be forever and ever. To the Almighty Father of the Almighty, Creative, and Redeeming Son, to Him and to their Almighty Holy Spirit be praise and glory everlasting as is meet and due. Amen.

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LENT ONE: "WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM?" (*Psalms* 8)

“His Son, whom the Father hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also God made the worlds; He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express Image of his Person, and upholds all things by the word of his power ...” (*Hebrews* 1.3)

Last Sunday evening in order to evoke the religious sense that our human lives, and the life of the whole cosmos, are processions moving from Jesus as beginning to Jesus as end, I told you about what Phineas Stewart does when he finds a suitable stick at my home. If he is playing by himself, he may be discovered singing in procession down my hall or across the room carrying the rod over his head. In imagination he is at St George’s walking up the aisle to Jesus, whether he precisely knows his destination or not. Tonight Phineas must lend us his aid again to help us understand the old teaching of the Church about images of God and in what sense man can be called the divine image.

From time to time, while his father and I are engaged in conversation (doubtless heavy!) or, just as likely, eating (often heavily!), Phineas demands our attention to offer us something apparently invisible. If we do not understand what is being given and do not receive it in the right way (accompanied by the appropriate “please” and “thank you”), Phineas, with some impatience for our dim wits, will explain that it is “pretend.” For better or for worse one of glories which children trail from their divine origins is the wonderful (to us hardened sensualists) capacity to inhabit an invisible world—I say “for worse” as well as “for better” because I remember a sermon by the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, Maurice Wiles (father of the great mathematician), in which he told us how, in order to overcome the terror of his young son in bed, he had to reach under the bed nightly, put leashes on the crocodiles lurking there, and drag them out of the room for the night. For Phineas, and for other children, the invisible world is every bit as real as the one we see and hear, and indeed often more real. Surely this is at least part of what Jesus means when he tells us that we must become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven (*Matthew* 18.3).

Monreale, Cefalù, the Royal Chapel in Palermo, the churches of which I spoke last week, and other ancient and medieval churches in general, agree with Phineas that the invisible is the truly real, and they are as determined as he is to teach us this. This may surprise you when you recollect how filled they are with carvings, paintings, and mosaics, with images shimmering in gold, scarlet, and blue in glass, stone, plaster and canvas telling one story after another? Is this not to make religion primarily a matter of image and story. In fact, however, if we pay close attention, we shall discover that there is no indiscriminate riot of images here, instead, all is governed by a rigorous Biblical and theological discipline. These buildings teach that the invisible is the truly real both by what they image, and also by what they rigorously refuse to represent. By what they give to our senses and imaginations, and equally by what they deny them, by what they affirm, and equally by what they negate, they proclaim with St Paul that God “dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see” (*I Timothy* 6.16).

Also, for Monreale, Cefalù, and the Royal Chapel in Palermo, we humans are not the true image of God. With the same determination they have in leading us back to the invisible God “whom

no man hath seen nor can see,” these churches lead us away from ourselves and back to the true Image of God. This also may surprise you when you consider Christ the Pantokrator dominating these Church and active everywhere in them. To represent the Almighty in human form is this not the highest elevation of the human? Is this not an equation of the divine and the human? Is this not to place the human at the centre? Answering these questions is my primary purpose this evening.

In order to answer them we must put before ourselves the question which confronted the old Church. Plato taught Christians that God was the perfect Good who cannot lie or deceive; the Church believed that this infallible God was the author of the Bible. In consequence, the great problem for the Church was to reconcile the seemingly contradictory texts in God’s book. Let us look at some of the most important texts on depicting God. I give them in the order in which they appear in the Bible.

From *Genesis* 1 (26) there is: “God said, Let us make man after our image and after our likeness” **[kat’ eijkovna h]metevran kaiV kaq’ omoivwsivn]**. Then there is the 2nd Commandment, *Exodus* 20.4: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above or the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” When Moses asks to see God, God answers: *Exodus* 33.20: “There shall no man see me and live.” Jesus affirms this: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (*John* 1.18) and “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (*John* 14.9). St Paul writes to the Colossians: (1.15): The Son “is the image of the Father, the firstborn of every creature” **[ojv" ejstin eijkwVn tou= qeou= tou= ajoratou]**, and to the *Hebrews* (1.3): “The Father hath appointed the Son heir of all things, by him God also made the worlds; He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express Image of his Person, and upholds all things by the word of his power ...” **[carakthVr th=" u]postavsew" aujtou=]**, and finally we may close our series of texts by quoting again what Paul wrote to Timothy: God who “dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, Him no man hath seen nor can see.”

Any one who accepts the Scripture as God’s speech to us, must reconcile three conflicting elements which appear in these texts: 1) God makes man after his image, 2) God cannot be seen, and imaging him is forbidden to us, 3) The Son of God is the true image, by him God is seen. The conflict between these was felt most strongly by the Church when Islam arose, conquered a great part of the Christian world, and fought Christianity at every level: militarily, religiously, and intellectually. Islam is the great religion of negation, denying precisely what Christianity affirms: God neither begets nor is begotten, he is the UnIncarnate. All images are refused by The Prophet. Many Christians were attracted to the purity of his purgative message. A gigantic wave of negation swept the Church, smashing all the images, one text of the Bible was heard above the rest: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing.” Monreale, Cefalù, the Royal Chapel in Palermo, all on the island of Sicily directly up against the coast of Islamic power and once subjected to it, the icon of the Pantokrator, and the old theologians give the answer to the breakers of the images, an answer which reconciles all the texts, an answer which puts the human in its place relative to God and nature.

Let us turn then to these churches again: In them, despite the overwhelming multitude of images, there is a very remarkable restraint, an outstanding absence: you will find no representation of God the Father. The Father remains invisible, even when the story of the creation is being told. God the Son, the eternal Word, the Almighty who is also the crucified, performs all the acts of creation. To make the significance of this absence clear to yourself, remember with me for a moment what is perhaps the best known modern depiction of the Creation, that by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. There the old bearded figure stretching out arm and finger as if to touch Adam, the image of God, the figure who also carries out all the other works of creation, is certainly God the Father. On that ceiling, we see very much of him, indeed, even his backside is displayed as he busily rushes off after making the sun and the moon to form the planets! Nothing of this Father God is seen at Monreale or in the other old churches. In them God is imaged by the Son, who in the quiet strength of unmoved wisdom, makes all things while seated on the orb of the universe.

Thus, the **FIRST** great statement of the old theologians who saved and restored the images is that **God is properly invisible**, he is beyond any representation in image, speech, or thought: God “dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, him no man hath seen nor can see.”

The **SECOND** truth they teach is that the one whom we cannot see or image gives himself an image. We cannot make an image of him but he represents himself. As Jesus says: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” **The Father expresses himself in his Son, his eternal Word:** “He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of his person,” as Hebrews has it; he “is the image of the Father,” to quote Colossians. The only-begotten Son, “Begotten of the Father before all worlds: God, of God; Light, of light; Very God, of Very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father” (to quote the Nicene Creed), he is the true and proper image of God.

A **THIRD** truth appears, when we remember what goes with each of these affirmations: “*by him God also made the worlds*; He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of his person, and *upholds all things by the word of his power*;” again, the Son “is the image of the Father, the firstborn of every creature;” again, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... *All things were made by him ... In him was life and the life was the light*;” still again, “Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father, *through him all things were made*.” **The Father conceives the Word as his image, and in that word, wisdom, order, and plan every creature is also conceived; creation is conceived as a whole, as a cosmos, a universe.** Among these creatures conceived in the divine mind is the human. One of the creatures, who is part of the whole, is man. The whole cosmos, with man as a part of it, is conceived in the Eternal Word: this is the third truth. But pay close attention to where we are: so far in reconciling our texts we have not left the invisible realm. We remain within the trinitarian life of God. As with Phineas Stewart, the invisible world is very full: it is the whole cosmos as conceived in the eternal Word.

With the eternal Word, however, we have the God-given basis of all the visible images of God, all his likenesses in space and time. This is the FOURTH truth. What is that basis? **Above all God can be imaged because the Word of God took humanity to himself from all eternity.** The humanity of God in Christ is the true humanity: humanity united to God, humanity without sin, humanity which can and has conquered sin and death. His unity of divinity and humanity, and his conquest of sin and death make him *Pantokrator*, the Almighty.

Only with this in mind can we rightly understand our first text, the text from the beginning of *Genesis*: “God said, Let us make man after our image and after our likeness” [**kat’ eijkovna hJmetevran kaiV kaq’ omoivwsivn**]. The old theologians subordinate the image in Adam to the image in Christ. **The first Adam, the natural creature, is an image made “after,” that is, “according to,” or “so as to reflect,” the first, the true, the “express” image, Christ the eternal Son.** This is not only because what is “of the earth, earthy” (I *Corinthians* 15.47) cannot fully express the nature of God. But it is also, because we, who are subject to sin, and did and do sin, must be recreated by the life, death, and resurrection in us of the true Image. Only by incorporation (“we in him and he in us”) can we come to conformity with the image and likeness of God. Listen to St. Paul: “The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit. ... That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural ... The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. ... And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (I *Corinthians* 15.45-49).

Jesus Christ, the True Image, is also the basis of our religious representations of God in words and in carvings, paintings, and mosaics, with images shimmering in gold, scarlet, and blue in glass, stone, plaster, canvas, and wood, telling one story after another. Because the eternal Word was “made Flesh,” became physical and material by his birth from the Blessed Virgin Mary, therefore our human pictures of Christ are images not idols.

FINALLY, Jesus Christ, the True Image, is also the basis of yet another image, the material universe itself. **The whole visible creation is in the eternal Word.** In him is the whole plan, purpose, and counsel of God, the forms and paradigms of the things which God creates by his Son. The entire world, depicted as created by the *Pantokrator* in accord with the blueprint rolled up in his hand, is an image of the Image. In consequence, as St John of Damascus wrote: “God was the first and original image-maker of the universe.”

**“What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” asks the Psalmist. “He is an image of the True Image” answers the Church. He comes forth as part of a whole, wedded to the rest of the cosmos by their common origin within the word of God.** Humanity is placed below the angels and as crown of the earthly creatures. Only when he finds his middle place, is assimilated to the Mediator between God and man, and lives conformably to his place will he live rightly, as part of God’s creation.

To the Creator God, the Almighty Father, the Almighty Son, and the Almighty Spirit, we pray, as we must, for conformity to the likeness of Him after whose image we were made, and to that same Triune Majesty we offer as His right and due the oblation of praise, honour, and thanksgiving. Amen.

[I have made use here of a rather surprising source, Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945) 748-752, which I feel especially obliged to acknowledge because I find the book in general to be polemical and destructive.]

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LENT TWO: "WHATSOEVER ADAM CALLED EVERY LIVING CREATURE, THAT WAS THE NAME THEREOF." (*Genesis* 2.19)

Last Sunday evening, we left the first Adam poised midway between the angels and the rest of God's creatures. We discovered that he was made "after the image of God" (*Genesis* 1.27) by the true and proper Image of God, Christ the eternal Word. This first Adam is "a living soul" in contrast to the Almighty Christ, crucified and resurrected, who is "a life-giving spirit" (*Genesis* 2.7 and I *Corinthians* 15.45). Only by growing into conformity with the true and living Word will humanity come into proper likeness to God. This is the end for which "the whole creation [now] groans and travails in pain together" (*Romans* 8.19-22). Groaning labour is not, however, where humanity begins. In accord with the account in *Genesis*, the theological artists of Monreale depict Christ Pantokrator leading Adam by hand and placing him in the "garden which God planted east of Eden" (*Genesis* 2.8). Tonight we must go and visit Adam there.

Before saying anything about the life of Adam in Eden, we should remind ourselves of the significance of this garden. It is the original harmony of God, humanity, and nature; therefore, replanting the garden "east of Eden," and living in it again, were the Christian hope, the aim of work and prayer. We need go no further than the Benedictine monastery, to which the great Cathedral at Monreale belonged, in order to see this. Remember what *Genesis* says: "a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads" (*Genesis* 2.10). Monreale and every Benedictine monastery has at its center this garden, this Paradise, as it is always called, with a central fountain and four paths leading from it. By following Christ, the monastic community is re-established in Paradise, the garden of Eden is reconstructed. We call St Benedict the Father of Europe, because in the West, Christian civilization was built by the numberless monks and nuns who followed his Rule. Everywhere they went, they replanted the garden of Eden, and implanted yearning for the harmony of that lost paradise.

At first, however, Adam was *lonely* in the garden of Eden. God sets out to give him company. Ultimately this will result in the drawing of Eve out from within Adam. For ancient interpreters, in agreement with Plato, this implied that the first single human was neither male nor female, existing before male and female were distinguished. In the mosaics, an adoring Eve is depicted

emerging from Adam summoned by the smile and blessing of the Pantokrator. Then, Christ the creative Word is shown gently leading Eve by hand to Adam. This evening we shall not get as far as the emergence of Eve, rather we shall contemplate what happens before she emerges. Let me remind you of the story, *Genesis* tells it like this:

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should live alone; I will make him a help, one meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he should call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (*Genesis* 2.18-20).

Before entering, as we shall do in a few minutes, the old philosophical interpretation of this story, it is surely striking and challenging just on the surface. Several mutually connected features stand out: first the living creatures of our world are created in order to fill a human need—that we have grown used to and assume—but, in contrast to what we assume, the need sought here is not one they fill by being consumed, just the opposite. God forms them for a psychic human need; they are made because Adam was lonely. The living beasts are created to give him company, and insofar as they do make him less lonely, they do so only as alive. “Oh well,” you may say, “What is remarkable about that? So the story turns the animals into human pets. How is that unusual? How can that be good? What dignity is their own?”

This question brings us to look closer, and we notice a second feature: Adam is represented as joining in the making of the living creatures, and as doing so by doing himself what God did “in the Beginning,” that is speaking. The human creative act by which Adam imitates God is to speak the names of the beasts. In fact, naming the living beings is the first act of human speech, and our first active imitation of God. The first occasion of human speech, this essential action of human beings, occurs when God and Adam cooperate in creating. Only by working together do they create “every living creature.” Put another way, our coming into proper being as humans happens when we help bring the living creatures into formed being. We humans form ourselves, when, by speaking their names, we give each of the living creatures their distinctive identities. To distinguish rightly is to unite, and the beasts thus become parts with us of an harmonic whole. Humans and the cosmos of living things come into being mutually and belong together essentially. Let me repeat the first great truth this story teaches so that we can contemplate it, delight in it, and treasure it: **Humans and the cosmos of living things come into being *mutually* and belong together *essentially*.**

Look a little closer yet at our text, there are more things, and things still more remarkable: God the Creator is represented as being dependent upon Adam in this naming: “God ... brought them unto Adam to see what he should call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” The connection between (1) the creative divine Word, (2) the creative human word, and (3) the universe of living creatures, is deeply intimate. Because our human being, and the being of the living world are *mutually interlocked*, both bodily and spiritually, God must wait on us in this. God waits to see what Adam will call the living creatures, and when the

image of God in us comes forth by this act of naming, what Adam does holds for God: “Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air and to every beast of the field.” Attend to the SECOND great truth this story teaches: **divine and human creativity cooperate in bringing forth the harmony of life.** Let us contemplate, delight in, and exalt ourselves in this privilege of our being. But, lest we lose it, let us equally remember what it is for: life and its harmony, God, humanity and nature as a universe of life.

We humans are indeed “fearfully and wonderfully made” (*Psalms* 139). Make no mistake, naming is not a superficial activity either for the one who confers the name, or for the one that receives it. We are sternly forbidden to “take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20.7) because God’s power and his holy name are linked. God himself is a named word: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (*John* 1.1). The Word creates by speaking himself: “God said, “Let there be light, and there was light ... and God called the light Day” (*Genesis* 1.3-5). When he makes the light, God makes what he himself is, from what is in him, and thus names himself. John puts it thus: “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (*John* 1.5). This is why the Gospel held out to us by the creative *Pantokrator* declares: “I am the light of the universe, what follows me shall not circle around in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Naming is creation. By the primal naming we make ourselves and we make ourselves known. For us rational creatures, that is knowing creatures, these two, making ourselves and making ourselves known, are at root the same activity. Moreover, by the primal naming, the world comes to be and comes to be known. These two, coming to be and being known, are at root the same thing, because the universe is a spiritual reality, its primal existence is as what God knows. Both the living creatures and humans are what we are for one another. We are bound up together body and soul. This is the THIRD great and terrible truth we learn from this story: **By naming the living creatures, this act of our essential nature performed in Adam, the universal human, before male and female were constituted, we humans have engaged, formed, and committed our very selves. Our being is bound up in the living harmony of God, man and beast.** Wonder, delight, and fear this truth!

All this is present for a superficial, literal reading of this extraordinary text. To explicate it fully is far beyond what we can enterprise here tonight. The most complete explanation of it was made by one of the very greatest minds Christianity has known. John Scottus Eriugena, whose name means John the Scot born in Ireland, appeared in France at the Court of King Charles the Bald in the darkest part of the so-called Dark Ages, the Ninth-century after the Incarnation of our Lord. Stunningly he arrived from those remote northern parts with an altogether exceptional knowledge of Greek. This enabled him to translate the works of the Greek Fathers, unknown at this point to the ignorant Latins, and to produce the first Christian synthesis of Greek and Latin philosophy and theology. Helpfully for us, such a synthesis also underlies what we see in the mosaics of Monreale. It is impossible to underestimate the importance, the intellectual brilliance, and spiritual power of what Eriugena produced in his *Concerning Nature*, the first, and in many ways the

greatest, theological system of the universe produced by Western Christians. Its unification of Greek and Latin theology, of Scripture and philosophy, of God, humanity, and nature leads the way. It underlies all the greatest efforts Western philosophers and theologians have made to demonstrate that the whole cosmos is *theophany*, the appearing of God. Eriugena's book is a *Hexaemeron*, an exposition of the Biblical story of the creation. The text at which we have been looking is at its center and is key to the rest.

The Nourishing Teacher in Eriugena's book asks: "Does it seem to you that there is a kind of concept in man of all the sensible and intelligible things the human mind can understand?"

The answer comes back from the well taught Disciple:

This clearly seems to be true: and indeed the essence of man is understood principally to consist in this: that it has been given to him to possess the concept of all things which were either created his equals or which he was instructed to govern. For how could man be given the dominion of things of which he had not the concept? For his dominion over them would go astray if he did not know the things which he was to rule. Holy Scripture gives us a clear indication of this when it says: "Therefore, having formed out of the earth every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, the Lord God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living soul that is its name."

It says 'to see,' that is, to understand what he would call them. For if the man did not rightly understand, how would he be able to call them rightly? But what he called anything that is its name, that is, it is the very notion of the living soul." (Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV.6, PL 768D, p. 414).

For Eriugena, humanity can know and name the animals because the human mind is the image of the true Image. The whole visible creation is in the eternal Word. In him is the whole plan, purpose, and counsel of God, the forms and paradigms of the things which God creates by his Son. Because we are images of the Image, what is in God is also in us. Because we are images of the Image, what is in God the eternal creative Word is also in us. This is why we can be co-creators with God.

Eriugena calls humanity "the workshop of all things." That is our great dignity. However, everything which is wonderful about us is also fearful. Together with our immense dignity, goes the other side: we cannot know ourselves or exist, body or soul, apart from the universe of life. We are as much in these living beings, as they are in us. When, by the true Image imaged in us, we named the beasts, we went out into them. When we destroy that universe of life, we not only destroy the conditions of our bodily life, we also destroy what is essential to our properly human life. We destroy the possibility of self-knowledge. We destroy ourselves body and soul. We darken the image of God in us so that we can see neither the world, nor ourselves, nor God. Terrible words, even more terrible reality.

Of these terrible realities, we shall have time to talk, as talk we must, when we enter more deeply into this season of repentance. Tonight, however, we remain in the Garden planted by God east of Eden; we see there, in the freshness of our beginnings, what we were in our primitive creative power. We contemplate and delight in what we were and in what, by the Almighty mercy, we shall be again in a new heaven and a new earth. By contemplating and delighting in our original humanity, wondering at its primal power, power to which God submits himself, we are led back to the true Image of which we are the images. Led back in wonder and love, we offer to Him, as his due, praise, thanksgiving, and the oblation of our very selves. These are owed to God the Almighty Father, God the Almighty Son, and God the Almighty Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

[You will find the following helpful: Robert D. Crouse, "INTENTIO MOYSI: Bede, Augustine, Eriugena and Plato in the Hexaemeron of Honorius Augustodunensis," *Dionysius* 2 (1978): 137-157; Charles Williams, *The Place of the Lion* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1951), John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, translation by John O'Meara, Cahiers d'Études Médiévales, Cahier special 3 (Montréal/Washington: Bellarmin/ Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), especially IV.5 ff. (PL 758 ff.), pp. 400 ff.]

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LENT THREE: "BUT FLESH WITH THE LIFE THEREOF, WHICH IS THE BLOOD THEREOF, SHALL YE NOT EAT." (*Genesis* 9)

In the sermons during these evenings in Lent, we are re-acting a very ancient and long-enduring tradition: Christian commentary on the Work of the Six Days, the *Hexaemeron* of the book of *Genesis*. The origins of this commentary actually began outside of the Church with two great Jewish scholars of the first century after Christ, Philo Judaeus and Josephus. The Christian commentators of the ancient and medieval Church borrowed from and built upon the work of these learned and pious Jews. Philo was a philosophical theologian and he wove together Plato's account of creation with the Biblical story. Christian thinking about God, humanity, and the cosmos imitated Philo by also drawing together philosophy in the Platonic tradition and the Bible. Philo the Jew was the first theologian with a sophisticated philosophical knowledge to undertake this and he led the way for Christians. For Philo, *Genesis* told us how to understand the nature of the cosmos.

In contrast Josephus was an historian. After having been defeated as a military commander in the war against the Romans, he wrote *The Jewish Wars*, recording the conflict. He then turned to his great project, the history of the Jews. In his *Jewish Antiquities*, *Genesis* is used to tell the story of the beginning of human history and of Jewish history. For Philo and Josephus, the Bible itself, and *Genesis* in particular, give a natural philosophy and a human history. Philo and Josephus are clear not only that these two must go together, but also that showing the order given to the universe by the Creator must precede dealing with human history and how we humans must live. Josephus supposed that people would be surprised that so much of his history tells the story of

nature (*physiologia*) [Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities*, I.4]. He gives the reason for this: “first we must study the nature of God (theou proton physin) and, then, having contemplated his works with the eye of reason, we can go on to imitate in our own deeds, so far as possible, the work of God, the best of all models (*paradeigma to pantôn ariston*), and endeavour to follow it.” For Josephus, all things told in his history are “in accord with the harmony in the nature of the whole” (*panta gar tēi tōn holōn physei symphōnon*)” [*ibid.*] God always acts so as to maintain the cosmic order eternally founded in his very nature.

Thus, at Monreale, after the story of creation is told and the structure of the cosmos exhibited, the premises of the Biblical history of humanity are related. We see the creation of Adam in conjunction with the bringing forth of other living creatures. While being instructed about the law by which he can live in the primal harmony, significantly a law about what he cannot eat, Adam is led by *Christos Pantokrator* into the Garden of Eden. Eve emerges and she is led by the same Almighty Word of God to her husband. Next the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent in the Garden, and their eating what was forbidden, are shown. Then, the *Pantokrator* appears, he confronts the humans with their new shame at their nakedness, and makes clothes for them. The harmony is destroyed, Adam and Eve are exiled from Paradise, and the flaming sword is set up to keep them from returning. Outside Paradise, the world humans make by their labour begins its history.

In the beginning seeing the interconnection between the story of humanity and the story of nature is inescapable. Nonetheless, when we read and reflect on the Bible after the first chapter of *Genesis*, we tend to see only the human history, and the interactions of God and man, we forget the story of nature. We lose sight of (1) what is also happening to nature, (2) what is happening between humanity and nature, and (3) what is happening between God, humanity, and nature. But that forgetfulness and failure of attention are results of our self-preoccupation, our narcissism, in another word, our sin, and they are profoundly destructive of body and soul alike. If the doctrines we have been considering for the last weeks are true, the story of nature cannot be absent from the Holy Scriptures, and in fact it is not.

This is clear in the tale of Joseph which we have been reading during each of these Evensongs in Lent. Joseph is essential to the history of Israel, God’s paradigmatic people, and he anticipates and prefigures Christ, but in his story everything happens because of a drought, the ensuing famine, and God’s work in Joseph “to save life.” I hope to say something to you about all that next week. In fact, everywhere in Genesis the interaction of God, humanity, and nature is the heart of the matter: our original sin results from the temptation of a snake and is portrayed as the eating of what we are forbidden to consume. Adam is cut off from Paradise “lest ... he take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (*Genesis* 3.22). Because of our disobedience to the law of the Garden God proclaims:

cursed is the *ground* for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. *Thorns* also and *thistles* shall it bring forth to thee; ... in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till you return to the ground. (*Genesis* 3.17-19)

In declaring his judgment, God continues with the words the minister pronounces when the ashes of Ash Wednesday are imposed year by year and, again, finally, when our bodies are interred in their graves: “Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” The first murder, of Abel by his brother Cain, results from Cain’s resentment that God accepts the sacrifice of the lamb offered by Abel and despises his own gift “of the fruit of the ground.”

After we are exiled from Paradise, the deep interconnection between humans and nature, revealed and established when Adam names the beasts in the Garden of Eden, continues. The “harmony in the nature of the whole,” established because Christ the Almighty Word brings humans and the cosmos of living things into being mutually, does not cease to be the law of life. Even with the change in our circumstances, humans and the cosmos of living things still belong together essentially. The story of Noah and the flood shows this. The great myth of the Flood also fixes the law by which humans must act outside the Garden if we are to live in accord with that harmony.

The beginning of the story presents a puzzle. On the one hand, the fault which causes the flood is represented as human: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Genesis* 6.8). On the other hand, God declares that he is resolved to destroy all animate creatures: “both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” The solution to the puzzle is shown in the provision God makes for Noah and the world of living things. Humans and the beasts are destroyed together, or they are saved together, because **they are one world. The living creatures and humans are what we are for one another. We are bound up together body and soul.** This comes out when God establishes his covenant, his agreement with Noah. He decrees that humanity and the living things will be in the same boat together:

Thou shalt come into the ark, thou and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee. And two of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep *them alive with thee* (*Genesis* 6.18-19).

When the waters of the flood retreated, Noah, his family, and the living beasts, all went out of the ark unto the earth which the waters had cleansed. There, on that ground made holy again, THE FIRST COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND MAN is established by God.

Christos *Pantokrator* fixes the agreement in a solemn form which possesses **all the universally recognised elements of a binding oath**: the parties to the contract are identified, the benefit to be conveyed is *established*, *sacrifice is offered on the altar*, the terms which bind the parties are fixed, and a sign recognised by the parties to the agreement is established.

You will all remember the good thing God confers and the sign to which both parties can point:

I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; ... neither shall all be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; ... This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations; I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. ... And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth (*Genesis 9.9-16*).

God agrees not to destroy the earth again by a flood, the sign and token of his covenant is the rainbow. Who are the parties? Certainly God, and humanity, under the figure of the Noah and his seed after him. But these are not the only parties in the covenant. According to the words of God, also included are “every living creature that is with you,” fowl, cattle, and every beast of the earth. Indeed, in one of God’s oaths humans are included only among “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” Ultimately, **the parties are God and the *universe of life on earth***. As in the Garden of Eden, these go together. What are the terms of the agreement? What must the living creatures do to keep their side of the bargain? God decrees to the humans:

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; ... But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of every man. (*Genesis 9.3-5*)

Everything in the earthly universe of life is given to humans for their use, but only on the condition of respecting the life. As in Paradise, the law of harmony excludes something from being consumed. The absolutely essential respect for life is shown crudely, directly, and simply when we do not eat flesh together with its blood. However, the dietary rule is not the substance of the requirement; the rule is only the token of what the established harmony requires. What follows demonstrates this in an astonishing way: the respect we are commanded to show animal life goes with God’s promise to avenge the murder of one human by another. This we would expect. But, equally, and surprisingly to us, God promises to avenge the killing of humans by animals: “the blood of your lives will I require at the hand of every beast.” The animals are thus shown to be part of the covenant. **This law of mutual respect for life in the earthly universe of life is the condition of the first covenant, the primal covenant, of God with his creation.** That first covenant is between God and “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” It fixes the terms under which God promises not to destroy the earth again. Moreover, there is nothing arbitrary about these terms. They follow with necessity from all we have found in the first chapters of Genesis.

The world of life is a universe of mutually interlocked parts because it is conceived in God the eternal Word, as what God knows and wills. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life.” Humanity, as the image of the Image, is created in the eternal Word and True Image. The entire visible creation is also an ikon of God. The human

is image, but only as occupying his proper place in the whole cosmos. Humans and the universe of living creatures are so intimately connected that Adam, the universal human, cooperates in making the beasts by naming them. Humanity and the world of living creatures come into proper distinct being together as parts of the living whole. When the disobedience of humanity to the limits placed on it disrupts the harmony of the whole, God destroys the world of living creatures, man included, and starts again. To prevent repeating this destruction, God binds “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” into an agreement. The terms of this covenant are that we must respect the life that is in each of us, human and beast alike.

This first and most fundamental covenant between God and his creation is not arbitrary but necessary, and its terms follow with necessity from the great fundamentals of revelation. Here we find the true Essentials of religion and of life. And so, at the price of destruction as the alternative, we are forced to ask what we must do to uphold our part in God’s great covenant with life?

The answer which comes back is remarkably simple and yet absolutely terrifying to us “the life thereof, shall ye not eat:” we must limit our consumption. **We must stop the consumption which destroys life.** What consumption is that? It is quite simply the kind of consumption which has become the essence of our Western Christian way of life, the consumption which our imperial success has imposed as the law which rules the globe. This is the consumption on which our economy, our politics, our social structure, our souls (or what little is left of them), our culture (the most trashy in human history), our justice (or better injustice) with those within and those without, our warfare and our peace are all constructed. The world order (or better disorder) which we Western Christians have established and dominate, depends on the continual creation of lusts, appetites, and false needs, of an endless will to consume. Our enslavement to these endlessly expanding needs drives an economy which we imagine determines everything else – and the economy does indeed determine everything else so far as we slaves to those appetites. Without continual “growth” (who can bear to use this metaphor of life here!?) we believe that the system will collapse. This worldly world is constructed by the lusts and imaginations of our hearts; everything, we are told, depends on “consumer confidence.” We know everywhere and immediately, and by what we touch, taste, smell, hear, and see that the endlessly expanding global system engulfing, polluting, corrupting, and desecrating everything is destroying, if it has not already destroyed, the conditions by which the universe of living creatures is sustained. The smallest honesty, the least attention, shouts that our whole way of life, is in fact the way of death, and breaks the first, most fundamental covenant between ourselves, nature, and God.

At Cefalù, in stone above the head of Christos Pantokrator, the life-giver, is written IUDICO, “I judge.” When we recognise God’s primal covenant, and the judgment under which we stand in respect to it, we fall, as fall we must, in disgust with ourselves and in horror, fear, and repentance before God, Father, Son, and Spirit, Holy and Almighty. Amen.

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LENT FOUR, MOTHERING SUNDAY: "THEY SHALL NOT HURT OR DESTROY IN ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN." (*Isaiah* 11)

"Behold we go up to Jerusalem" announces Jesus. With these words, the Church set out on her Lenten journey to the Resurrection. We are en route to "Jerusalem, above, free, and the mother of us all." This Sunday, before we travel with Jesus along the hard road of his Passion, he offers us food for the journey in a feast which also shows us our destination. By the creativity of the Divine Word ("he took the loaves and gave thanks" *John* 6), nature matches human need, and we feed on bread and fish "as much as we wish." This harmony and superabundance belongs to the Peace of Jerusalem, community like this is our goal. Faith shows us our future, love moves us to it in hope. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (11.1). The heart of Mothering Sunday is hope awakened by the vision of the future which God wills for us. Every recitation of our Lord's prayer reminds us of the structure of Christian hope. "Our Father," we pray, "thy will be done." To be children of God we must make his will our own. For our Lord, prayer and hope are indissolubly linked to right will: "Thy will be done, thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

Our prayer must be for what God wills, our hope must be rightly placed. As Boethius puts it: "Hope and prayers are not placed in God in vain; if they are of the right kind, they must be efficacious. ... Lift up your mind to the right hopes, and put forth humble prayers on high." Boethius continues, reminding us of the Pantokrator at Cefalù, the one who proclaims IUDICO, "I judge": "A great necessity is laid upon you, if you do not wish to deceive yourself, a great necessity for honesty (*probitas*) when you act before the eyes of the judge who discerns everything" (*Consolation of Philosophy* 5.6 conclusion). We must hope rightly in order to pray rightly. What is the hope which God wills? What kingdom do we pray for on earth and in heaven? What hope will enable us to continue on the road with Jesus? Let us look to what is set before us.

The Pantokrator of San Vitalis in Ravenna, the resurrected Christ, renewed in beardless youth, summons us to the replanted Garden. Enthroned over the altar on the orb of the earth, Jesus establishes the Kingdom in Paradise regained, flowering with lilies and roses. Doves drinking from fountains of living waters, peacocks strutting their stuff among trees laden with fruit, deer grazing along the verdant banks of fresh-flowing springs, lambs led by the Good Shepherd to feed in pastures green, birds of every color and plumage nesting in the flowering tree of the Cross, these are among the many ancient depictions of the hoped for Paradisal kingdom. This Christian hope, to return to the Garden God planted "east of Eden," was also the old aspiration of Israel.

Recall what Isaiah the prophet saw coming forth: a ruler from out of the house of David, endued with wisdom and understanding, who "with righteousness shall judge the poor, and with equity he gives the verdict for the meek of the earth." In his kingdom of justice: "the wolf also shall lie down with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ... And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on den of the viper. They shall not

hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (*Isaiah* 11.4-9).

Our hope is for a restored harmony with nature. Crucially for the issues of our own day, this harmony depends on the very justice for the poor which our system of consumption and global exploitation denies. This hope for the future is also a hope for what conformity to Christ enables here and now. I have reminded you of the Paradise set at the center of every Benedictine monastery, a paradise entered by those who submit themselves to the Rule of the school of Christ. Nova Scotia has a Benedictine hermitage, so to speak, in Crousetown. Around the walls of the room which faces on his garden, Father Crouse has an inscription from Scripture carved by Colin Starnes. They are words St Bernard took from Isaiah for the habitations of his Cistercian monks and nuns: “The solitary place shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the lily ... and a highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness ... it shall be for the wayfarers ... no ravenous beast shall go there” (*Isaiah* 35.1-9).

We stand under God’s judgment for breaking the first and primal covenant God made with humanity after the Flood, the covenant God established between himself and “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” On the condition of our respect for life, God agreed not to destroy life on the earth again. By breaking this agreement, we risk the destruction of the universe of life on earth. We break it by our limitless consumption. Nonetheless, God reveals a future good for which we may and must hope. But **Christian hope is not a facile and false optimism, the optimism which we may even call evil, the optimism which moves the world built upon endless consumption. Instead of optimism God gives us a hope which passes by way of the Passion, passes by way of the suffering which transforms.** The hope God gives passes by way of the Passion of the Christ, of our suffering, of the passion of nature. Human suffering receives the pulse of hope when it is placed within the Passion of Jesus. Hope passes also along the way of the passion we have inflicted upon nature and upon the living creatures with whom our lives are entwined.

St Paul teaches us that the Passion is cosmic: “The earnest expectation of the whole creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was not made subject to vanity by its own will, but by the will of God who made it subject in hope; ... The whole creation groans and labours together in pain” as it waits the fulfilment of its hope (*Romans* 8.19-22).

To behold just a portion of the Passion of the Creation, attend for a moment to the highest, holiest mountains, once the dwelling places of God, now the sporting grounds of the rich, littered with the desecrating litter of their climbs; consider the red earth worn down and turned grey farmed as if it were a chemical mass; observe suburbia the unstoppable cancer gobbling up the fertile and fruitful; naked forests clear-cut, denuded of every nobility, their soil washed away to suffocate river and lake. Look at our lakes turned into deadly acid baths. The purity and strength of rivers, seas, and oceans were the Scriptural images of divine justice. Now the rivers and seas have become poisonous sewers, the oceans are our ultimate garbage dump, their beds dragged over and over again under the weight of crushing rollers until their once fertile breeding places are

sterile wreckage. See the inhabitants of the deep decimated, the flesh of Leviathan himself who once “laughed at the shaking of a spear” (*Job* 41.29) rotting with disease, bird and butterfly without place to rest or nest, the animals who share the earth pushed out into extinction. We dare not look at the animals we once called “domesticated,” that is sharing our domiciles, our homes. Imprisoned in over packed pens, nets, cages, and sties, cesspools of their own excrement, they are treated not as living beings, but as collections of diseased DNA, maintained on diets of antibiotics and pesticides, cannibalizing one-another, so as to produce cheap but contaminated protein. The whole creation enslaved, insulted, poisoned, desecrated, and tortured, groans and labours together in pain. The optimism of human selfishness confusing itself with the common good is the power working here.

In contrast, to show us how God subjects the creation to vanity in hope, how by redemptive suffering he preserves life, the Church reads us the story of Joseph during Evensongs in Lent. We concluded this story tonight when we heard how Israel went down into Egypt impelled by hope given by God in a vision: “God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night: ... fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will surely bring thee up again” (*Genesis* 46.2-4).

The story of Joseph and his brothers is read alongside the Passion as told by St Luke, because the descent of Israel into Egyptian slavery and the liberating Exodus of God’s people are seen as the anticipating paradigm of the betrayal of Jesus into the power of wicked men, his suffering, his death at the hands of Imperial aliens, his descent into Hell, and Resurrection. The prophetic type of the Passion and Resurrection is seen in the journey of God’s beloved down into captivity and the passage over into freedom. This is why, when next Sunday, we move from Lent into Passiontide, our readings will switch from the book of Genesis to the book of Exodus. The whole movement of the people of Israel, God’s beloved, is also foreshadowed in the particular story of Joseph himself. The foreshadowing of the whole in the part is discerned when we look at the essential role played by nature in the tale of Joseph and his brethren. The dynamic of the interactions is betrayal and substitution. In Joseph betrayed again and again, we see Jesus. In the salvation of the traitors by acts of redemptive substitution, we find hope for ourselves.

Joseph is the youngest and the favored son: “Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age ... and when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him” (*Genesis* 37.3-4). His brothers plot to kill Joseph and, as they ready themselves for the terrible deed, they hold him in a pit. Saved from murder by his brother Reuben, he is sold instead into slavery in Egypt. This mixture of being favoured and of being betrayed, the mixing of suffering and of rescue, sets the pattern for the rest of the story. In Egypt, Joseph’s virtue brings him rapid promotion, and he is made master of the household in which he is a slave. But the same attractiveness makes his master’s wife lust for him; because he refuses to betray his master and have sex with his wife, Joseph is falsely accused by the woman, and is thrown into prison for two years. But neither the pit, nor slavery, nor imprisonment are able to hold Joseph down, and he becomes the right hand man of the jailor. Then Joseph is betrayed yet again; this time by one of those he helped in prison. Nonetheless, his skill at the

interpretation of dreams brings him to the notice of Pharaoh. Joseph decodes Pharaoh's dream which signified the seven fat years of plenty and the seven lean years of drought: "There shall come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: And there shall arise after them seven years of famine ... and the famine shall consume the land." As a result of this interpretation, once again Joseph rises to the top, this time he is made prime minister of Egypt, and is charged with making provision for the famine during the years of plenty, and with distributing the accumulated surplus during the lean years. The famine which makes Joseph great in Egypt also brings him back into contact with the brothers who had betrayed him.

Joseph's family is caught in the famine and the brethren are forced to go repeatedly to Egypt and to Joseph, to buy grain. By a long stratagem, Joseph, unrecognised, forces the brothers first to bring to Egypt Benjamin who had replaced him as the youngest and most favored, and then to deliver Benjamin to Joseph as his slave. At this crucial point another brother, Judah, offers himself as slave in substitution for Benjamin. **Joseph is so moved by the brotherly love seen in this substitution of one life for another, brotherly love reversing the hate by which he was betrayed, that he reveals himself.** To those who once intended his murder, he speaks of himself as having undergone his suffering for their sake. These are his words of forgiveness, grace, and comfort:

I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life ... it was not you that sent me hither, but God ... Come down unto me, tarry not. Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen ... and there will I nourish there. (*Genesis* 45.4-11)

Joseph presents his betrayal by his own brothers, his imprisonment, and sufferings as part of God's good will, his purpose to preserve life. Retrospectively, he offers his passion, his sufferings, even those at the hands of his brothers to them. Looking at what was done to him in that light, he urges his family to enter God's plan for them in hope. "Come down" he insists. There we know Israel will grow so large that it will become a threat to the Egyptians, a Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph," will enslave them until Moses is sent by God to set his people free. They will pass over through the midst of the sea.

The operation of God's hope is by way of Passion, suffering. The essence of the demanded Passion is made altogether clear, it is defined. **God's providence works in us when we carry the burden of the other, especially the other who hates us.** The essence of the Passion is substitution. Hope works when Judah substitutes himself for Benjamin, when Joseph accepts his passion on behalf of life, when Jesus Christ suffers to redeem the whole creation labouring in pain. **God's hope still works and will work again when we make his will our own, when we hope for what God wills, when we place our sufferings within his. Hope still works and will work again, when all of us and each of us wills the community God wills, the community he established in the Beginning. Hope will return when we choose to bear rather than to inflict suffering so that "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain."**

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LENT FIVE, PASSION SUNDAY: "WHEN HE HAD FASTED FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS, HE WAS AFTERWARDS AN-HUNGERED." (The Gospel according to *St Matthew*4)

*In ieiunio et fletu*

*Orabant sacerdotes:*

*Parce, Domine, populo tuo.*

So, in the exquisite setting of Thomas Tallis our choir prayed last Sunday evening: "With fasting and with tears let the priests pray, saying: 'Spare thy people O Lord'." When, as a Gentleman of the Royal Chapel, Tallis set these words to music in 16th century England, they were not intended for a private group. Instead, as in the Israel to which they were first preached by the prophet Joel, these words were an expression of the public fasting, repentance, tears, and prayers of the whole society. A few minutes attention to your Book of Common Prayer will show you the corporate fasting and prayer which it ordained and regulated for the common life of the English nation. Beyond the seasonal fasts, like those of Advent and of Lent, and or those which accompanied solemn prayer, like Rogationtide for the success of the planting, or the Ember Days which fall in the octave of Pentecost, there are fasts which preceded and prepared the soul for festival and feast. The rhythm of spiritual life matched the rhythm of nature; fast balanced feast, lean and plenty alternated. The same law matched the life of the church to the life of the state: for every *Te Deum* there is an *In ieiunio et fletu*. **Public and corporate fast, repentance, and prayer followed on great public calamity like defeat in battle and plague or accompanied beseeching God in time of great common need.**

There was general praise at home and abroad of the leadership of President George Bush at the time of the murderous terrorist victory against the United States in September of 2001. Nonetheless, some American commentators expressed surprise that their Pontifex Maximus had not urged his people to repentance and sacrifice. Some members of the House of Representatives, conscious of the fasts proclaimed by the Congress during the Revolutionary War and by President Lincoln during the Civil War, urged President Bush to proclaim "a day of humility, prayer and fasting for all people of the United States" in which they would "seek guidance from God to achieve a greater understanding of our own failings and to learn how we can do better in our everyday activities." Heroic sacrifices had been made by firemen and rescue workers, their martyrdoms were celebrated, the dead were mourned and commemorated, the bereaved comforted by the national high priest, but this petition he did not grant. Neither priest nor people were urged to fast; none donned the sackcloth or ashes of repentance. The President did not make his own the words of the Prophet Joel:

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; Gather the people, sanctify the congregation ... let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber and the bride out of her bedroom. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say Spare thy people, O Lord. (*Joel* 2.15-17).

No, instead of fasting and repentance, President Bush admonished his people to carry on as before. Doubt or discontinuity in commercial life would grant victory to the enemy. Despite much heartsickness, consumption must be resumed, lest the economy falter. The greatest fear was that consumer confidence would be lost; that we would be less willing to take on more debt in order to consume more, this was the greatest anxiety.

In his idolatry of the economy of consumption George Bush differs not a wit from his fellow Western Christian leaders. In our Christian West, the greatest corporate duty, and the greatest burden, of the citizen is to discover ever new appetites and needs, to assume an ever greater burden of debt so that the pattern of consumption will be preserved. The ceaseless expansion of desires determines the public good our politicians seek. As the great Canadian Christian philosopher, George Grant puts it: “The conquest of human and non-human nature becomes the only public value.” (*Lament for a Nation*, 57). Grant’s use of the word “conquest” sounds the trumpet of alarm. An alarm we need to hear as our leaders send us again to war to preserve our way of consumption, deceptively and euphemistically described as “our way of life.”

Our consumption and its co-relative conquests of nature, peoples, and territories are the greatest enemies of peace. They require the exploitation and control of the resources of the whole globe. The hatred we arouse is the result of our desecrating invasion of the entire earth. Our control and exploitation of the greatest part of her resources demands this endless intrusion. Canadian, English, American, even French leaders all asserted that the Islamic terrorists were opposed to our democratic way of life: the openness and the freedom of our societies. This is simply false. Above all what they want is for us to stay home. Their murderous wickedness is undertaken as vengeance for our past and present imperial manipulations of their lands, states, and cultures, and to persuade us to leave them to themselves. A fasting repentance which withdrew us even momentarily from what keeps us entangled in global empire would bring this to consciousness, and the fast, as a break in the pattern of our consumption might actually be a step on the way to peace.

In Israel, in the Scripture, and in old Christianity of the Book of Common Prayer, fasting is primarily collective, in the way that Lent is, except that in the past the fast usually applied to the whole society not just to groups in it. The people of God understood that, because our sins and evils are primarily corporate, our repentances must be equally public and collective. Indeed, insofar as we do sin individually—and we certainly do—what we regard as sins and their causes are largely determined by our social existence. **Moreover, the sins we commit, individually and collectively, hour after hour as part of our ordinary, habitual, lawful, communal way of life exceed the evils those who break the laws and the accepted moral code of society are able to inflict.** This becomes immediately apparent when we attend to war. War is undertaken socially

and politically, but, even when fought by necessity to avoid a greater evil, it involves us all in gigantic evils and terrible sins.

War, because it is a collective act, provides a pattern we may use to expose the harm we commit ordinarily and unconsciously. Take one example of the evil we habitually and unself-consciously commit: consider our current modes of transportation and production of energy. Almost all of them are destructive of the environment, and indeed of the health of ourselves and our neighbours. Every time we turn on the ignition keys of our cars, or the light switches in our homes and offices we commit an evil against life and our neighbours. But because these harmful common modes are now almost the only available means of transport, heating and lighting, because they are legal and ordinary, we remain unconscious of the evil we inflict in using them. By such habitual ignorance, and only by it, we keep ourselves from the conscious guilt of actual sin. How terrible for us corporate fasting and repentance would be! How terrible if the members of Congress had achieved what they sought: “a day of humility, prayer and fasting” for everyone in which we would “seek guidance from God to achieve a greater understanding of our own failings and to learn how we can do better in our everyday activities.” It would bring into consciousness the great sins we commit as law-abiding citizens. Collective wilful ignorance, masking our corporate sinfulness, was not what our old religion, the religion of Scripture and of the universal Church desired. They wished to be cleansed from their “secret sins” (Psalm 19.12).

**Of old what is now considered *our chief duty* as citizens, the expansion of appetites and desires, so that our lives are consumed with getting and spending, was regarded as sin itself and the root of many of the other sins.** The same must be said of selfishness. In the past this defined sinfulness, now we are urged to the pursuit of our self-interest, and it is assumed that the invisible hand of God makes this pursuit serve the common good. Nothing more manifests the difference between contemporary Christianity and the religion of Scripture and of the universal Church than this optimism about the goodness of liberated selfishness. The optimistic expectation that the good for the whole will result from the pursuit of our own happiness is the opposite of Christian hope. This optimism places our revolutionary Christianity totally in opposition to the religion of Israel and the old Church. If we paused, just for a moment in public fasting, repentance, and prayer, if we distanced ourselves for a short space from our common way of consumption to reflect on what it inflicts on nature and humanity, we would begin to see what busyness hides from us. We would see that the invisible hand in which our world has placed such confidence is the hand not of God but of Satan. The law which determines the results for all life of the way we now individually pursue happiness makes us the destroyers of the conditions of life itself. The good of nature, of cult, of culture, and of community, the goods on which all life depends, are destroyed in the freedom of the self-interested pursuit of happiness. Those with any sense of what Scripture and the old Church taught are astonished to find what Bible and Church once denounced and fled in fear for the souls of individuals and the soul of society are now promoted as Christian virtues.

Equally, we must be stunned to find what stirs up those who represent themselves as conservatives, those who think of themselves as defending Scripture, the old doctrines and old

life of Common Prayer. These Christian reactionaries, in perfect accord with the revolutionaries, are ceaselessly troubled about sexual questions. In this panic, the reactionaries and revolutionaries co-operate with those who want to consign Christianity to the margins of life and the reactionaries enable the media to characterise Christians as narrow bigots and hypocrites. Our great collective sinning, destructive of life itself, is left unexamined and un-repented by these 'conservatives.' Why is the energy of our world be prophets so misplaced? I suspect that they are not conservative enough, that they have not entered deeply enough into Scripture, into the old doctrine and life of the Church. I suspect that they have not identified themselves with the old rhythm and order of her common prayer, of her fasts and feasts. Having failed in this, their campaigns reflect the interests of those for whom it is best that worry about sin become worry about sex. Otherwise we might hear what God has to say about the injustice at home and abroad upon which our way of life depends. Many of those who regard themselves as the true Christians wish to hear nothing about the covenant God established between himself and "every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." Nothing more demonstrates and assists the weakness of Christianity in our time than connivance with the media to make Christianity a pre-occupation with sexual tastes and practices. Let those thus anxious, hear the words of our Lord:

Woe unto you ... hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, *justice, mercy, and faith*; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (*Matthew 23.23*)

In Lent as a Church, as a community, we enter together into the fasting of Our Lord Jesus. In the wilderness, he fasted forty days and forty nights so that, in the weakness of hunger, he might be tempted by the devil (*Matthew 4.1&2*). And indeed Satan appeared. As Dostoevsky discerned, in the three questions put by "the wise and mighty spirit in the wilderness," "the whole subsequent history of mankind is brought together into one whole and foretold." Allow me to close this series of sermons with a word on the first and last temptations.

In the first Satan asks: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." To this temptation we have collectively succumbed. Insofar as with us appetite and consumption are the infinite, and without limit, they supplant what belongs to God, separating us from him. Jesus, however, takes his answer from Scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone, But by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The third temptation is to global power. The Devil proposes to give Jesus the very power which the Christian West takes pride in exercising. Satan showed him "all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." From this text we can deduce the source of our global imperial power. Jesus responded in the opposite way to that which we have chosen: "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, And him alone shalt thou serve.'" Our Lord, weakened by hunger, humbles himself in worship to God, denies himself power, and embraces weakness. By fasting Jesus seeks to know his limits, to suffer in weakness the temptation of power. In the face of the seduction of power, he *embraces limit and weakness*. **Experiencing, knowing, and willing, even loving our limits and weaknesses is the condition of true life.**

The life of the Church is the imitation of Christ. We follow him first corporately and consequently individually.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; Gather the people, sanctify the congregation ... let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber and the bride out of her bedroom. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say Spare thy people, O Lord.

Amen.