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“The Pearl of Great Price”: Integrating Ecological Concerns into the Christian Life. A Symbiotic Outlook (Corinna Delkeskamp-Hayes)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English

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That Christians should open their eyes to ecological problems, and recognize their responsibility for the preservation of their natural environment, is the insight underlying this conference at the St. Michael’s institute. And I want to thank Father Alexander for having invited me to participate, for the permission, as a woman, to break the silence we should usually observe, and for the opportunity to learn more about what it means for a Christian to worry about the environment.

That Christians should open their eyes to ecological problems, and recognize their responsibility for nature’s resources, was brought home to me in Germany while I was still a Protestant. In its 1983 Vancouver meeting, the World Council of Churches initiated its conciliar process, a path of mutual learning, concerning what was presented as Christians’ common commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This undertaking, as it had been initialised and strongly advocated by German academic theologians, had ignited a tremendous amount of activity among the more established Christian communities in the then Federal Republic. We all realised that problems with the preservation of a healthy environment and with a responsible use of natural resources reflect and impact on problems with poverty, and that military conflicts reflect and impact on the growing scarcity in natural resources as well as poverty and injustice. Concern for ecological issues was recognized as a way of practicing the Christian virtue of charity. As a result of this awareness-raising and information-spreading campaign, church-buildings everywhere were adjusted to ecological norms and many members of Christian communities changed their behaviour with regard to unnecessary waste or their choice of consumer goods. In the end, that Christian initiative became a powerful political force of civil opposition. It impact on policy was however short-lived, given the economic challenges German unification brought in 1989. As in the 1960s with socialism, German Christian communities had spearheaded a political movement that would morally penetrate the German society as a whole.

Then, just as now, the moral consensus within the majority of German voters was deeply re-fashioned, and the prestige of Christianity as a resource for moral and intellectual leadership was enhanced. And then, just as now, German Christians continued to locate their Christian commitment to love of neighbour and gratitude for creation on the level of participation in public discourse and advocating what seemed to be appropriate social and environmental policies. Only on the level of law and public policy, after all, could the problems of poverty and pollution be effectively solved. At the same time, increasing numbers of German Christians discontinued to practice their Christianity: they quit attending Sunday service, praying at home, and the Roman Catholic among them ceased to confess or obey the moral rules proclaimed by their pontifical leader. German Christians did continue to pay their church taxes however, at least until the economy changed pace. After that, increasing numbers of German Christians decided that they no longer need the services formerly centred around their local church buildings. Their voting support for social and ecological policies would transform social democracy into a kind of super-church. Many German Christians had exchanged their personal Christianity for collective, tax-funded Christianity.

I am not arguing, of course, that the turn to ecology, or even to ecology along with social justice and the peace movement, was the only, or even the main reason for the de-churching of German Christianity. The causes for that decay are too far-reaching to be addressed this morning . Still, for our conference the fact that somewhere in the world fellow Christians' turn to ecological issues (at the very

least) did not avert their de-churching, nor slow down its progress, should give us pause.

The title of my presentation draws attention to a tension in how ordinary Christians, such as I myself, tend to approach their life in Christ. On the one hand, we have Christ's own clear indications. Life in Christ is the pearl of great price, and whoever finds it should sell all he has in order to acquire this most precious treasure (Mt.13:46). This parable reflects the way in which Christ answers the lawyer who wanted to become his follower: sell all you have and come follow me. (Lk.18:22) It also reflects such warnings as "whoever wants to win his life loses it, and whoever is prepared to lose, will gain it" (Lk.9:24), or "what use is it to gain the whole world and to lose one's soul". (Mk.8:36)

Such words are unsettling. Usually, of course, we recuperate quickly. We seek a sustainable "middle way" of integrating Christ's somewhat trying demands into a life which, while not altogether placed under the cross, seeks to accommodate at least selected splinters of the cross, hoping that the Divine mercy will let whatever good intentions we manage to invest compensate for the deficiency of our performance. Or we try to "integrate" by conceiving of the "Christian life" in terms of a hierarchy of "Christian goals": Even if we fail with regard to the highest, we can still carve away at the lower ones. We can pursue, for example, ecological projects that are at least designed with a view to profiting mankind. Or finally we try to "integrate" our – more or less charity-adjusted – worldly concerns into an eschatological horizon, trying to assure ourselves that in the end we will "all be saved". But with all that, the discrepancy between our own, forever lukewarm, response to the fervour of God's ever renewed offer of transforming love remains. The sense of this discrepancy is powerfully re-awakened when we witness other Christians, like the German mainline ones, trying to "integrate" the pearl of great price into a life of very limited personal sacrifice and dedication, not even noticing how they risk to lose the pearl.

The question I wish to ponder with you this morning is: Can we think of an alternative, less costly way of integrating ecological concerns into the Christian life? We all agree that the destruction of natural resources, which are needed for sustaining the life of future generations on this planet, could be reduced, if we all devoted ourselves to the prayer and askesis that goes with acquiring the pearl of great price. Most of us are unable and unwilling to pursue such a path. Apart from our spiritual immaturity, we realise that such a sacrifice, as long as only few would undertake it, would make no noticeable ecological impact. Most people who are committed to ecological sustainability therefore recommend a more or less extended and politically enforced askesis. Several difficulties attend such

suggestions. It is hard to decide which kind of changes in life style would help the planet best. Scientific research keeps suggesting different solutions every other year. Some efforts at improving ecological sustainability have turned out to increase the damage, rather than reduce it. Apart from all these problems, Christians know that an enforced askesis is not what furthers a truly Christian life.

So where is the alternative? Is there a less spiritually costly way of integrating ecological concerns into the Christian life? I think there is, and my subtitle indicates the symbiotic sense of my proposed solution. But in order to get at the meaning of that symbiotic solution, we need a little detour. We must appeal to the Holy Scriptures, as approached in the light of the Christian Tradition. What do these Scriptures teach about such “integration”, as evaluated against the need to appropriately respond to the offer of the Divine love? What should we mean by a “Christian life”? Let us examine three texts, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from St. Paul’s letters. Each of these offers a particular insight into what it means to fail in offering the required response. The first insight concerns the origin of all human failure, i.e. Eve’s seduction by the serpent. It throws light on inappropriate ways of “integrating” ecological and other supposedly Christian concerns into a life that remains ultimately man-centred. The second insight derives from the way in which Christ Himself responds to His three temptations by the devil. It specifies how one should integrate various Divine revelations into one coherent assessment of the Divine will. The third insight results from St. Paul’s recommendations about how to most effectively ward off temptations. In presenting two different paths for responding to the Divine love, it teaches us Christians in the world how to integrate our ecological efforts into our dependence on the model and support provided by the monastery. It is this integration which will be described as symbiotic.

1. Eve’s seduction: Changing God’s design into a human goal

As a result (among other failures[1]) of Eve’s listening to the serpent, all humanity lost that “pearl of great price” which had been enjoyed by our forefathers in Paradise. The loss occurred not because Eve set her mind on something evil. Nor did the deceiver utilize any mean inclination or unconcerned laziness in Eve, when first capturing her attention away from God and His ordinances. Instead, he appealed to that very sense of human dignity, to which (so she was led to believe) her imprint as an image of God should make her feel “entitled”. What the deceiver presented to her looked precisely like that very highest human good which the Divine Creator Himself had designed humans for. By offering his willing cooperation

with the Divine transforming grace, he was to grow into the likeness of God, i.e. become divinised. The priceless pearl of Paradise, of life in communion with God's life-sustaining energies, was lost even though humans pursued their Divinely intended highest goal. It is just that they pursued it independently of their life in loving communion with, and hence loving obedience to God.

For the project of integrating ecological concerns into the Christian life this means that we must take care not to endorse a similar independence. Usually Christian environmentalists claim that what they wish to accomplish agrees with what is Divinely ordained. They portray the title of this conference: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" as a goal which the Lord Himself set down for humans: Man is to govern the created cosmos as a lord, but a lord under the Lordship of God, and thus as a steward of nature, and responsible for safeguarding nature's cosmic beauty. Usually such Christian environmentalists also portray love of neighbour as a goal, which the Lord Himself imposed: Man is to make sure that even the underdeveloped countries of this world, and even future generations, get their fair share of the world's natural resources. Neither of these portrayals is altogether wrong. But they are just as not-altogether wrong as was the deceiver's appeal to Eve's goal of making it toward the likeness of God. Both portrayals in effect separate Christians' very pursuit of what they take to be "Christian goals" from their life in Christ. They are thus as misleading as was the devil's suggestion.

In other words: When God's encompassing design for man, and the Divine ordinances given man for inviting his willing cooperation in the Divine grace at work towards realising that design, are framed in terms of particular goals, they are easily mistaken as what man can accomplish by himself, and independently of God. The devil changed Eve's very native human desire for divinisation through cooperation with the grace of God into an instrument of betrayal precisely by presenting it as a goal she could pursue on her own. Likewise contemporary ecologists change Christians' native human desire for harmony with the cosmos and the unity of all mankind into an instrument of betrayal by presenting it as a goal they can pursue on their own. Just as then Eve was misled into believing that she could «integrate» her autonomous pursuit of self-perfection into her paradisiacal existence, so would-be Christians today are misled into believing that they can «integrate» their autonomous pursuit of harmony and unity with nature into their life with Christ. In the context of this misconception, that task of «integration» reduces to a «proper hierarchisation of values». The Christian virtues of responsibility for nature and of charity become conceptualised in a way that makes them compete for priority with the Christian virtue of attending church services. In a societal setting characterised by scarcity of time and energy, and by bias towards empirically measurable efficiency, it is only "natural" that church

service attendance will be downgraded, and reserved for special yearly feast days. And this is how among modern Christian ecologists the pearl of great price is lost.

In order to keep the project of integrating ecological concerns into our Christian life deception-proof, we must refrain from construing that life as directed towards realising particular goals. Such construals tend to separate the human pursuit of the Christian life from its Divine support. It does not help to assure oneself that such support will continue, if only one refrains from transgressing the Divine proscriptions. Our fallen state, with our dominant passions disordered, renders us blind with regard to what it means to obey. Once Eve had turned her mind from sustained communion with the Creator, abandoning her embedded-ness in the Divine love, the forbidden fruit's appeal to her senses became irresistible. Enslaved by a desire that had lost its proper object, she became unable to adequately prioritise, or to properly weigh the Creator's warning against the serpent's assurance. Eve's fallen-away mind, just as our fallen minds, are unable to properly weigh the risk of «losing one's soul». If an ecological project is to stay deception-proof, it should, like all truly Christian projects, aim at undoing what deprived man and his natural environment of Paradise. Such a project should aim at re-establishing intimate communion with God. Christian life would then revolve around not primarily what Christians do, but around the Divine energies sustaining what they do. Adequately proclaiming that "The earth is the Lord's and the Fullness thereof" and adequately sharing nature's resources with others thus becomes an exercise in properly responding to the Divine love. It becomes an exercise, first of all, in rendering ourselves once again receptive to that love.

Suppose we accept all of this. Does that mean that we have already solved our problem? Christ calls us to love our neighbour. Could we not let that love take the form of pursuing an ecological project that feeds the poor? Christ, speaking through David (Ps.23/24:1), calls us to praise the beauty of creation. Could we therefore not let that praise take the form of restoring that beauty through supporting a natural reserve? Could we not in either case make sure that we never forget to invoke and acknowledge our dependence on Divine support? Could the Christian ecologists who were inspired by the conciliar process of 1983 have avoided weakening their commitment to the liturgical centre of Christianity by faithfully remembering its importance? And would such remembrance not guarantee that no trespass of a Divine commandment would mar our ecological pursuits?

It is in response to this supposition that we now turn to the second Biblical story.

2. Christ's rejection of the devil's deception: Not

even thinking of human goals independently of life in Christ

After his baptism in the Jordan and a 40 day fast in the desert, Jesus was exposed to three temptations (Mt. 4:1-11). Here again the devil disguises his hostility to God by playing the Bible scholar. This alerts us to the fact that we should be watchful even with those who invoke Holy Scripture.

Each temptation appeals to prophetically announced aspects of what it means to be the Messiah. Characteristically, each of these appeals deceptively focuses on one isolated quotation respectively. Each time, Christ rejects such “literalism in Bible studies” by invoking a complementary quotation, which sets the first into perspective. He thus illustrates the way in which the teachings offered by the Scriptures cannot be taken at face value: They disclose their meaning only to those who enter into the spirit behind their meaning. For our concern with the meaning of integration, this implies that Scripture offers adequate guidance towards the Christian life only if each particular guidance is properly integrated into an account of the whole.

For the wider project of integrating ecological concerns into that Christian life, the second of these diabolic deceptions is revealing. Here Christ is challenged to change the rocks into bread, and thus to effectively solve the problem of hunger in the world. We could imagine that a similar temptation could have focused on all other creaturely needs, and even all suffering in the world. Refusing, Christ reminds us that man is not designed for well-being, merely as such, and in view of his fallen, and therefore merely finite, existence. Christ’s argument: “man does not live by bread alone but (also) by every word from the mouth of God” (Mt.4:4) conveys two important instructions about the Christian life:

1. Since Christ is Himself the “Word of God”, and also the “Bread of life” (Jn.6:35),“life” is made to encompass that eternal life of a never-ending growth towards the Divine glory, which had been envisaged in man’s Divine design. With Christ as our bread, humanity can re-access Paradise. His death on the cross has renewed the offer of eternal life, which had been withdrawn when Adam turned from communion with God.

2. In thus addressing our fallen state, Christ, who is everywhere described as moved by pity and full of mercy, nevertheless relativises the significance of earthly suffering. As the Fathers of all times have taught, the suffering which man brought upon himself by turning away from God was more than an – as it were – natural

consequence of his disconnection with the source of all life. That same suffering however also works as a therapy: it can teach man to appreciate what he lost, and motivate his taking every effort to regain it. In refusing to attend to earthly human suffering in and by itself, Christ highlights the fact that such suffering can ultimately be relieved only by man's willingly partaking of His victory over death.[2]

Accordingly, even the merely conceptual separation of earthly life or earthly hunger from eternal life and hunger after the Divine glory betrays a devilish deception. The same applies to the destruction of man's natural environment: It is a deception to separate our yearning for a restored integrity of nature from our (and nature's own, Rm.8:19) yearning for resurrected eternal life. That resurrected and eternal life, after all, which Christ grants those who partake of His bread in Holy Communion, also encompasses the totality of a renewed creation. We must, of course, conceptually separate the excessive damage mankind causes in nature by wilful or negligent greed and waste on the one hand from the abandonment of nature to the forces of decay and death which happened through Adam's fall on the other. But as Christians, we should recognize that we cannot try to avoid the former without looking for Christ's having already freed us from the latter. Only through Christ's having overcome death, and only by partaking in His victory, can the egoism and individualism underlying human waste and greed be overcome. Conceptually separating the struggle against humans' destructive misuse of creation from the struggle for humans' acquiring eternal life in Christ should be rejected as a self-deception.

For the project of integrating ecological concerns into the Christian life, all of this implies that there is strictly speaking not a "life in Christ" as something holy and set apart from our dealings with the word on the one side, and a pursuit of ecological projects as something secular on the other, so that the latter even could come up by itself, in order to then be "integrated" into the former. We should, in other words, not conceive of Christianity on the model of "a religion", insofar as this model depends on separating holy places, times, performances, stories and texts from secular places, times, performances, stories, and texts. Such a model, in other words, separates the environment as a merely physical reality from its liturgical celebration as Divinely created and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Instead, our every dealings with that environment should themselves be liturgical. If we still wish to speak of integration, we can no longer perceive it in terms of relating two different areas of our life to one another. Even that attempt of relating which, in terms of gratefully and piously remembering the one while responsibly and efficiently addressing the other, was proposed at the end of the first section, is not sufficient. Instead, a proper kind of integration should amount to refusing, as Christians, to accept the ultimately separate existence of something holy and

something secular.

Take for example the women who spend Sunday morning in the kitchen preparing food for those who are hungry after liturgy: Properly speaking, these women are not absent from the liturgy but partake in it. In the same way Christians' every dealing with nature should be pursued as part of a liturgical engagement which, after Sunday's liturgy is over, spans the whole week. We should not only, as the first temptation story made clear, not replace our ongoing concern for abiding with God for even a short interval by the independent pursuit of even those "goods" which are ratified by God. Even more, we should not even conceive of the pursuit of any such good separately from the more encompassing concern for remaining in the presence of God, the Divine personal source of all good.

This may sound like asking a lot. But it is, in fact, nothing but a corollary to the way in which the central Divine command that we should love our neighbour is subjected to a number of heavy qualifications. These qualifications, in establishing the proper biblical context, reveal that what appears to be a worldly duty is in fact a part of the liturgy which is our life. The first of these qualifications requires that we should love our neighbour "as ourselves", the second extends our "neighbour" to "our enemies", and the third places this command under a still higher challenge, namely to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. First, to love others "as ourselves" presupposes that the fallen state of mankind, by which humanity's original unity had degenerated into an multiplicity of individuals with divergent and even opposing selfish pursuits should be overcome by the way of our loving. Second, to love our enemies (Luke 6:31-6) as ourselves presupposes that we love others with precisely that love which God Himself extended to us by rendering Himself as the "son of man", i.e. vulnerable to human enmity. It presupposes, in other words, that we have been made partakers of that Divine love Christ showed us. Third, it is precisely the dedication of all our heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving God, as required from all humanity even in their present worldly existence, through which the lived communion which Adam enjoyed in Paradise is restored. Turned the other way around, these three qualifications reveal the seemingly "spiritual" (love, directed to God) as integral element of the seemingly "worldly" (love of neighbour). In either direction, they illustrate that inseparable compound-ness of the Christian life which Christ invoked when unmasking the devil's second attempt at deception.

Placing one's concern with man's natural environment into the context of Christians' call to love their neighbours makes sense in light of Christ's own translation of "to love" into "doing good" (Mt.7:12). But again, in a properly contextualized or integrated manner, that "good" must be linked with the only one

Who is truly “good” (Lk.18:19). Humanity’s well-being, or even humans’ survival on this planet, must not even conceptually be separated from mankind’s faring well and surviving at the final judgment. This implies that one must resist exclusively focussing – satanic deception like – on isolated Scripture teachings like the famous judgment criterion offered in Matthew 25. Here Jesus threatens that only those will be saved who (among other basic services) fed the hungry. Taken in a properly integrated form, this teaching will no longer be misunderstood as endorsing government or international welfare policies. It will be understood as imposing the exercise of a compassion which, since Christ identifies with the lowliest of our brothers, is tantamount to venerating (if in a different manner) His holy icon in the lowest of our brothers.

At the end of our discussion of the first “seduction story” about Eve’s trespass of a Divine proscription, one could still venture the opinion that the central challenge of worldly engagements with man’s natural environment was to keep those engagements trespass-proof. After this second “deception story” it has become clear that Christians are placed under a Divine prescription (of partaking in the bread of life which is a life of love) which is so life-consuming that not to trespass it is impossible. In other words, the difference between trespassing a Divine prohibition and not fulfilling a Divine command reduces to the difference between more and less serious ways of failing to pursue the life in Christ we are called to. There is no chance of ultimately “getting it right”. To be sure, after the young lawyer failed to prove his love for God by giving away his earthly goods, Christ reassures His disciples: while it is impossible on human grounds that a rich man can be saved, all is possible with God (Mt.19:26). But this reassurance does not weaken the challenge. It is not, after all, for the sake of God but for the sake of our ability to become like Him that we are called to overcome the deadly poison of our self-love.

But how, in this world of human mortality and morbidity, and of nature’s vulnerability to human destruction, is a Christian to respond to such a call?

3. St. Paul’s advice on how to minimize temptation

One of the most contested portions of the Pauline letters concerns his advice to abstain from marriage (1.Cor.7:1). Today, he is often charged with pathological hostility to women, or with Gnostic prejudices against humans sexuality. But these charges are clearly unfounded: an Apostle who specifies women’s equality with men as extending not only to the spiritual realm (as companions in the

resurrection) but also to sexuality, affirming that the husband has no more ownership over the body of his wife than the wife has over her husband's body (1.Cor.7:4), cannot be supposed to be prejudiced. And indeed, his argument for virginity (of both men and women) rests on his recognition that "whoever is married will care about things of this world" (1.Cor.7:33-34). St. Paul simply acknowledges how difficult it is to love one's beloved and shoulder the responsibility for a family, while at the same time directing all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving God.

This recognition in fact reflects the way in which Christ Himself refuses to accede to Martha's request of sending Mary off to the kitchen. Christ does not criticize Martha's worldly care about hungry visitors. Yet He points out that Mary has chosen "the one thing only, which is necessary" (Luke 10:42). That "one thing" consists in the single minded effort to receive the Word of Christ, and thus God Himself, into her heart. It is this single-mindedness, which the all-consuming demand on humans' response to the Divine love requires. It is this same single-mindedness which, according to St. Paul's experience (and ours too), is quite incompatible with worrying about those "many things" which come with getting too deeply involved with worldly responsibilities.

Both Christ Himself (in the story about Martha and Mary), and after Him also St. Paul, endorse the withdrawal from such responsibilities. They do so because, once again, the solution to the problems experienced within this fallen world by fallen humans cannot be achieved through the resources offered by that fallen world. This solution has been effected by Christ's victory over death. While that victory is accessible to humans burdened with their fallen nature in a mostly anticipatory sense, it will become fully accessible in the resurrected creation promised for the age to come. In order to partake, now as well as then, of the re-established glory of creation, man's primary concern is not with the natural environment as such. The fallen character of that environment, after all, has rendered it in many respects inimical to man. The prophecy which Adam received when being driven from Paradise announced hostile thistles to defy his labour, and hostile animals to threaten his life. In order to secure his own precarious survival, man must use, even exploit, and thus infringe upon a natural order that is marred by dis-order. It is an illusion to expect more than a series of emergency adjustments, often themselves precarious, from environmental programs. The integrity of creation, as invoked by the 1983 conciliar movement, was lost already when Eve turned to the serpent. Christians indeed seek to participate in nature's ultimate healing, and to reduce their own destructive impact. But they can do so most effectively through an ascetical way of life. Such a life first and foremost heals our own dis-oriented nature, thus preparing us for the resurrected glory of the cosmos. It also presents a

way of using this Divine gift in a God-loving way, bearing the burdens which come with its fallen state with a grateful patience that sanctifies both us and the nature around us.

St. Paul's virgins, and perhaps by extension even Mary at the feet of Christ, represent an askesis that directly opposes fallen man's subjection to two powerful drives: sex and food. Christ acknowledges that in this world both the Martha-type worrying and being troubled about many things (Luke 10:41), and the Mary-type concentration on the pearl of great price, have their place. Similarly St. Paul limits his recommendation of virginity to those (admittedly few) who are able to bear it. For all others, it is just as clearly "better to marry than to burn" as – so we may add – to fast merely according to the canonical rules than to scowl.

Thus, from the very beginning of Christ's proclaiming the kingdom of God, and of the first framing of the life of the church, a duality of Christian regimens is admitted. Ever since Christianity had become a "safe" option through St. Constantine's establishing Christianity, that second path of harder askesis and of dedicating all practical work to *theoria*, became more popular among those who desired further perfection in hermitages, sketes and monasteries. It is the monks who fully confront Christ's call to "give away all they have" and "die to themselves" in order to acquire a more favourable starting point towards turning in love to God. They choose the "better part". It is they who most fully devote themselves to a life that, rather than merely «acquiring» the pearl of great price, seek to render themselves precious vessels of that pearl.[3] This is not to say that theirs is the only path to future salvation, or even to achieved holiness already in this life. There are numerous paths to sainthood, and some of these are compatible with life in the world. But the vast majority of those who pursue that latter path must set their hope on Christ's answer to the disciples' question about "who can then be saved?": With God many things are possible. Those who do not manage to pursue the hard, monastic path, just as those who fail in pursuing that path (and that is to say: all humans, after all) are referred to the intercession of God's personally chosen friends.[4] Thus the church never ceases "Through the prayers of our holy fathers…" to call on the saints. These prayers, to be sure, do not relieve any one of his own struggle against temptation, and his own effort toward adequately responding to the Divine love. But in these struggles and efforts, Christians living in the world can be sustained by closely following the model offered by the monastery, and by actively seeking the support of those monastics who know how to pray.

In what concerns the project of integrating ecological concerns into the Christian life, the monastic askesis in fact realises that ideally "responsible use" of natural

resources which people living in the world can offer only with difficulty. Similarly, the liturgical character of the monastic life sanctifies its natural environment: plants and animals simply grow more joyfully when surrounded by prayer. There is a characteristic beauty about monastery gardens, as they disclose in microcosmic ways that nature is a Divine creation. Saints and monastics are the true spearheads of environmentalism. They implement in practice the truths this presentation sought to distil from the three temptation texts in Holy Scripture. They maintain, as the backbone of their daily activities, a liturgical rule, thus aiming at a restored communion with God, outside of which nothing "good" can be accomplished. They thus integrate the hospitable charity extended to visitors into the love of God, outside of which the required relativisation of humans' earthly needs and sufferings cannot be accepted. And they cultivate a caring attitude to the gifts of nature, outside of which ecological projects run the risk of replacing the damage deriving from human greed by damage derived from human arrogance. It is by emulating monastics' example and by begging for their spiritual support that Christians who live in the world can meet their own environmental responsibility.

For Christians in the world, the project of integration thus in the end amounts to their accepting a symbiotic relationship, on a spiritual level with the saints, and as a lived reality with the monasteries in their vicinity. As St. Paul reminded the newly converted community of Corinth (1.Cor.9:7-14), deriving spiritual profit from one's teachers and older brothers in the faith imposes on us worldly Christians the responsibility to compensate, and to offer material support. Not surprisingly, such a symbiotic relationship will be found to involve some courses of action which are dissonant with a secular understanding of ecological correctness. Regular visits to a monastery use additional fuel. Regular support of a monastery, especially if added to the equally important regular support for one's local church, requires material sacrifice. For some, the additional costs which often come with buying organically grown food and other "fairly traded consumer goods" compete with their ability to take their share in helping their monks. Symbiotically integrating one's ecological concerns with a Christian life may in some or many cases require that we set our priorities in a way that differs from that of secular ecologists. But it will be a way that avoids pursuing something "good" independently of pursuing communion with the personal Divine source of all good, and that avoids conceptually separating our worries about the planet from our hope in its re-creation, and that avoids despairing in the face of God's all-consuming demands by taking, in a very humble way, part in the life of those who brave those demands.

[1] The most crucial other failure was the unwillingness of both our forefathers,

once challenged by God, to repent, and to ask forgiveness.

[2] A wonderful synopsis of Patristic teaching on the spiritual meaning and value of illness and suffering is offered in Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Theology of Illness,* transl. from the French by J. and M. Breck, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2002, pp. 55 ff.

[3] In this sense Symeon the New Theologian speaks of Christ Himself having transformed him into a «jewel case, the genuine one, of the beautiful pearl» (*Hymns of Divine love by St. Symeon,* transl. from the Greek by G.A. Maloney S.J., Dimension Books, Denville, NJ, p. 93.

[4] A particularly clear description of the way in which the saints' intercession is indispensible for any Christians' path to salvation is offered by Archimandrite Sophrony, «Au seuil de l'Orthodoxie, Lettre à David Balfour (II)*«, Buisson Ardent 9,* pp. 9-13.

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