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The Earth Is the Lord's and the Fulness Thereof

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During the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, there developed first a notion and then a theology of man's dominance over and ownership of the earth. Even the creation narrative was re-interpreted as giving man a purely utilitarian ownership of the earth. While this desire to dominate the earth predates these two extraordinary developments in human society it had previously been necessary only to accommodate oneself to a certain amount of control, such as irrigation. It was these two events, one on the level of the mind and the other on the level of our action, that made it possible for us to carry out such domination.

Nevertheless, in the Law we are taught that all the land belonged to God and that portions were divided among the tribes to be held in trust and used for their needs. And as the embodiment of their responsibility to cultivate their ability to respond, like the lord, with care.... God even went so far as to give a sabbath to the land, so that it might be rested and resuscitated.... From this it is clear that God cares for the earth and desires that it be sustained. It is equally clear that the earth does not belong to us, rather we belong to it. Not only are we an integral part of the ecosystem, but at the end of our lives the earth will reclaim us and return us to her bosom. God made us from the dust of the earth and established an important principle, for He also breathed into us the spirit of life. We are, therefore, both of heaven and of earth. In a manner of speaking, we share in the image of the two natures of Jesus Christ, and so are invited to cultivate the sanctification of our incarnate way of being.

"Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from bondage to corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

The Apostle Paul tells us that all of creation fell together with man, and that it has been redeemed together with man. This is obviously a great mystery, for here he says that there is an intimate bond between man and the rest of creation. The purpose of man is not simply to worship God, but to serve as a point of unity for all that exists. Man alone consists in the spiritual, the material and the intellectual, and he is therefore a microcosm of the whole universe – both the visible and the invisible. We have the capacity through our worship to serve creation as God loves creation. Ortho-doxa is

more than just "right worship;" it indicates also the correct understanding of worship. Such ortho-doxa, right worship with a correct understanding, makes it possible for us to serve creation with blessing and healing. There is no relationship with our Lord and Saviour where there is not blessing, but cursing; there is no cultivation, but only a stripping away (a kind of spiritual strip mining), no healing but only harm. Man should have fulfilled this vocation as a unifying element in nature, for he is not only its crown, but the microcosm of creation. This vocation could only have been fulfilled through unselfish love and the absence of egotism. This would have constituted a proper use of his energies. The fall really constitutes a proclivity to habitually misuse our energies, not the loss of them. Christ healed this misuse through His perfect humanity, in whom the perfect human nature is expressed, making unity with God and the cosmos again possible for human beings. A unity which Christ realized for us in His unity of perfect humanity with complete divinity. Human nature, restored in Him, has now the ability to make the proper use of its energies. This proper use is manifested in the Church, His Body, even if the members of the Church so often fall short of it. Understanding this is necessary in order for us to understand the complexities of the Incarnation of God. Jesus Christ as Incarnate recapitulated our nature and became the new Adam in order to correct our failures, complete our calling, fulfil our purpose and therefore deliver not only us, but the whole cosmos from bondage to corruption.

In the beginning - in the creation - man fit into the ecosystem in a perfect balance. Had he truly acquired the knowledge of good and evil as a gift from God in the fullness of time, he could have maintained that balance. Having accepted from Satan a counterfeit of that knowledge, man's relationship with the cosmos also became counterfeit. The fact that the human race has come so close to destroying the ecosystem upon which its own life depends makes it clear that humanity has misunderstood not only its own Being, but its relationship with the earth, with the universe, with God, and even with itself. These misunderstandings, Not forming ourselves on that which is foundational to creation - the Creator's love and affection - always come hand in hand. We misunderstand both our own being and creation, including the whole of the universe, and God in one and the same act. This set of misunderstandings, born of a self-centered egotism, is a major aspect of what Christ came to earth in order to heal. It is important to remember that self-centered egotism is not something most people are able to see and to understand about themselves, but it is deeply embedded in their whole way of putting their understanding of the world together. It is a fundamental misrepresentation of self, world and God, and the only way we can untie this knot is by coming to know how it began and shedding the light of Christ on this unconscious orientation.

To a large measure, the Incarnation is a response to man's misinterpretation of himself and his misunderstanding of his purpose in the universe. In the words of Canadian philosopher David Goa, "The incarnation of Jesus Christ invites us to our own incarnation, to our own becoming enfleshed in the world of God's making. Only then are we free from a world of our own making, a world that does not exist, but can be

nurtured as a real illusion in ways that destroy the very foundations of our life together. We can and do turn creation into detritus. But we can also, and to this we are called, turn the dry places into fertile land when we seek to be faithful to Adonai. It was so with Abraham and so it is our calling."

Let us try to focus the light of Orthodoxy onto the darkness of this misunderstanding.

THOU SHALT LOVE [CHERISH AND NOURISH] THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF... AND HE, WISHING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF, REPLIED, 'AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR!'"

This is the second half of Christ's great "moral imperative." It is often thought of as a "command," but I would like to think of it as the truest form of morality. What is shocking to me is that so many people, many of them in positions of political and economic power, so callously disregard the welfare of their own children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, in their reticence to make a little lower profits or adjust our over-heated lifestyle, our so called "standard of living." Yet, surely, our own children and grandchildren are our neighbors. Even if we turned to a radically ecologically sound lifestyle today, we would still leave the next several generations with a depleted agriculture, an insufficient source of fresh water, and large areas of formerly food producing land in a state of desiccation and ruin. The earth came to us as a sacred trust, and we will pass it on in such a condition. As a whole, our generation will not respond to the current crises in an appropriate manner because our socio-economic structure is based on harsh competition for short term profits. Our current "standard of living" in North America is based very heavily on a self-centered and egoistic measure. It does not reflect the lifestyle of the lower middle class and the poor, but that of the upper income levels in Canada and America.

We can ask what we few, as Orthodox Christians, can do in the face of such huge problems. Aside from our prayers and our struggle for our salvation, we can offer spiritual and social leadership in a sound process of education and action which is based in Scripture and the moral imperative of Jesus Christ, rather the dreamy New Age romanticism that has dominated much of the ecology movement. Let us think together about this for the next half hour.

[Here, an open question and answer and discussion session takes place]

Glory to Jesus Christ!
+Archbishop Lazar