

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BEAUTY OF CREATION IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

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And God saw that it was beautiful

Among the founding myths, cosmogonies and stories of the origins of our world, the book of Genesis, read by the three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - proposes two significant stories about the beauty of the world. According to the first, from the so-called "priestly" tradition, as composed by the priests exiled in Mesopotamia after the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE, God created the world in six days, after which "God saw that all that He had made was good" (Gen. 1:31). The term used by the Hebrew text is *tov*, meaning that creation is a very good thing. However, the text of the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint done in Alexandria in the third century BCE for the Jews of the Diaspora, and thus predating the Masoretic text which is quoted by the New Testament texts, and still used today by the Orthodox Church, gives, in fact, a somewhat different reading. The Greek text translates *tov* as *kala lian*, which means "God saw that all that He had made was good and beautiful at once" (Gen. 1:31). Indeed, the adjective *kalos* in Greek means not only "good" but "beautiful" as well. The beauty of creation is thus an original feature of our world. But this beauty is not just aesthetic beauty. It is primarily a theophanic beauty, that is to say, it directs us to the divine Creator. As the Father of Christian monasticism, Abba Anthony, said in the fourth century AD: "My book is the nature of creation; I read in it the work of God".¹ Nature, for many Christian authors, is an open book which each of us can read and, from it, learn something about God. The creation contains, in some way, seeds and traces of the living God. It can be seen as a reflection, or better yet, an Icon of the Creator.

Also, according to the same story of Genesis, Adam, man and woman, was created by God on the sixth day in His image. God said: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). In the Masoretic text, "image" and "likeness" are included as synonyms. Man is the only creature in creation to reflect the Creator. But, again, the Septuagint gives us a somewhat different reading. The Greek text says that man was created *kat'eikona kai kath'omoiōsin*, that is to say "in the image and likeness", clearly distinguishing by the word "and" the "image" and the "likeness" as two different matters. Commenting on this passage, Christian authors later say that the "image" is a constitutive and immutable quality of the human being, while the resemblance is something that can be lost or developed: it is the original glory of the man and his ultimate hope.

For the Father of Christian biblical exegesis, Origen, an Alexandrian of the third century AD, Adam is not *the* image of God, but *created "according to the image"* of God. For him, the only image of God is the Son. Basing his thought upon a passage from the Gospel of John, where Christ says concerning this: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), Origen concludes that Adam was created as the *image of the Image*, according to the image of Christ who is, Himself, the Image of God. He writes: "For it is not said that God made man in His image and likeness, but that He made him in the image of God."²

¹ Cf.: Evagre le Pontique, *Traité pratique* 92. SC 171, Paris, 1971, p. 695.

² Origène, *Homélie sur la Genèse* I,13. SC 7 bis, p. 61.

Moreover, Origen does not consider the terms "in the image" and "likeness" as being static but, rather, as dynamic. For him, "according to the image" indicates a beginning, or a seed, which inaugurates a process or a development of the human being to the status of "likeness" which is to say a complete deification. Origen joins the thought of Irenaeus, who, a century earlier, also envisioned image as the starting point and likeness as the end point of a development of the deification of human beings. For Irenaeus, too, the first Adam was a draft of Christ. For him, Christ is *the true Adam*. According to him, it is Christ Who reveals the true likeness of God and Who allows us to realize that the true purpose of human life is participation in the divine life (2 Peter 1:4).

Yet there is a second creation story in Genesis, which is actually older than the first, since it is found in the "Yahwist" document. According to this second account, Adam was formed of the soil of the earth and the breath of life was breathed into his nostrils by God: "YHWH God formed man out of the dust taken from the ground. He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). Commenting on this account of origins in the fourth century AD, Gregory the Theologian, known in the West as Gregory of Nazianzus, noted that the human being was created as a link between the creation and the Creator, between the material world and the spiritual world. Indeed the human takes his body from the earth and receives the breath of life from the Creator. Gregory emphasizes this participation of the human being in two worlds: "The creating Word organizes a living being composed of the two - I mean the natural world and the invisible nature: it is man. He elicits the body of the man out of the material previously created, and He takes from within Himself a life which He puts in man, that is to say a spiritual soul and the image of God. Then this man, a second universe, big in its smallness, He places on earth as another angel, a worshiper made of various elements, a beholder of the visible creation, an initiate of the invisible creation."³ The second story also states that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden "to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2, 15). Gregory the Theologian says that it is because of this dual participation in the visible world and the invisible world, or rather through his initiation to the spiritual world that man received from God the responsibility of being the guardian of the material creation. Human beings thus receive by their creation and their constitution the task and duty to be the guardians and the stewards of this creation which is beautiful. And as befits guardians of a museum of beautiful and good things, they receive the obligation to do nothing damaging, destroying, desecrating, wasteful, contaminating or polluting to and of it. But this does not stop there. Gregory describes the human, with many antinomies, as follows: "king of what is on the earth, a subject of that which is above, a terrestrial and a celestial being, ephemeral and immortal, visible and intelligible, an intermediary between greatness and baseness, both spirit and flesh: a mind for giving thanks, the flesh for pride; the first, that he may remain forever and glorify his Creator, the second, that he may suffer and, suffering, remember what he is and be corrected if he aspires to greatness, a being living here below and on the way to another world, and, full of mystery, by his inclination towards God he becomes god".⁴ Gregory thus stresses that the aim and goal of the mystery of man's creation is deification.

More than a millennium after Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory the Theologian, and a few thousand years after the drafting of the creation stories of Genesis, Nicodemus

³ Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours* 38, 11. SC 358, Paris, 1990, p. 125-127.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 127.

the Hagiorite published, in the eighteenth century, a large anthology of Christian texts on prayer which remains up to now a reference for spiritual life in the Orthodox Church. Nicodemus chose as the title of his book: *The Philokalia*, that is to say "The Love of the Beautiful", and he explains this by declaring that God, Who is the Source of all beauty and goodness, created a beautiful and good world, placing there man, created His image as its guardian, so as to unite the creation with the Creator. In other words, for Nicodemus, the goal of spiritual life, in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, is deification and the way to achieve this is the incessant invocation of the divine Name. This is the common thread in all the texts he has chosen for his anthology on prayer. In his preface to the latter, he writes:

"God, blissful Nature, Perfection beyond perfection, Source more than good and more than beautiful, the Creator of all that is good and beautiful, having decided from all eternity in His thearchic principle to deify man, and having established this goal in advance, from the beginning, within Himself, created man at the time that He saw fit. He took matter to form the body, and He took from His own nature to put a soul in him. He placed it in this small world of the body as a great world by its many powers and eminence. He thus made him a watchman over the sensible creation and an initiate of the intelligible, according to Gregory, the great theologian. What indeed was man? Truly, nothing other than an image and a full Icon of all graces created by God. God then gave him then the law regarding His order, as a test of freedom. (...) If he kept order, he was to receive as a reward the enhypostasized grace of deification, becoming god and so radiate pure light for all eternity".⁵

However, the second account of creation in Genesis tells us that this, unfortunately, did not come about. The human being heard voices other than that of God and found himself excluded from the Garden of Eden, to live in suffering, pain, confusion and division, subject to disease and death. It tells how the serpent, "the wiliest of all beasts" seduced Eve by getting them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. And we know the rest: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, attractive to look at, valuable for clear sight. She took a fruit, she ate, she gave also unto her husband with her and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked "(Gen. 3: 6-7).

Thus were the original plan of God disturbed and the original beauty of creation defiled. Referring to this passage in Genesis, Nicodemus the Hagiorite continues in the preface to his *Philokalia* "But - oh perversity of jealousy! - the one who introduced the evil from the beginning could not bear that this deification be implemented. He conceived jealousy against the Creator and against the creature (...). Against the Creator, so that the all-hailed power of goodness, which in its energy, deifies man, not be recognized by anyone. Against the creature, that he not be given the possibility to participate, by deification, in such supernatural glory. The evil one, in his craftiness, deceived the unfortunate man. By obviously deceptive advice, he made sure that the man transgressed the divine order. And by detaching him from the glory of God, the rebel was apparently victorious as he wished to be, since he could break the fulfillment of the eternal counsel of God."⁶

Beauty will save the world

Thus do Judeo-Christian accounts of the origins of our world explain the origin of evil, and we could add: the ugly, or anything that is opposed to the good and

⁵ Nicodème l'Hagiorite. Préface à la Philocalie. *La Philocalie* (trad. française de J. Touraille), vol. 1, Paris, 1995, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*

beautiful in the initial order of things. But a century after Nicodemus' *Philokalia*, a great Russian writer, of the Orthodox confession, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, affirmed in his novel *The Idiot*, that beauty will save the world. We read the words of Hippolite Terentyev addressed to Prince Myshkin: "Is it true, Prince, that you said once that beauty would save the world? Gentlemen, he cried, making all society a witness, the Prince claims that beauty will save the world! (...) Do not blush, Prince! - you would pity me. What beauty will save the world?"⁷

"Beauty will save the world" is undoubtedly the best known quotation from Dostoyevsky's work and the most frequently used, but not necessarily correctly understood. To interpret it, we must be aware that in his novels, Dostoyevsky puts into the mouths of his characters different views that confront each other during discussions to elicit reflection from the reader. In this case, the character is speaking Hippolite Terentyev, a young tubercular man, who is revolting and pathetic. And he asks Prince Myshkin, the hero of the novel, precisely what sort of beauty would save the world. The latter is in love with the beautiful Anastassya Filippovna, who is also coveted - but with a selfish and destructive passion - by another hero of the book, Rogozhin. This love triangle therefore depicts the contrast between the Prince and Rogozhin, who both love the same beauty.

However, Prince Myshkin, who embodies the fool in the eyes of men, because he considers the world with empathy and innocence, has understood that this beauty is bruised; it is in need of salvation, of fulfillment. Elsewhere, in front of portrait of the beauty, the prince exclaims: "Ah, if she had goodness, all would be saved!". Thus, between the two lovers, Dostoyevsky wants us to understand that the sense of beauty is not revealed by itself, but is discerned through the light or the darkness in the beholder. In the perception of the prince, the beauty reflects a humiliated and hurt soul, which only sacrificial love can heal, while in the eyes of Rogozhin, it reveals a mad passion, selfish and deadly. But the young Hippolite Terentyev knows the deep Christian convictions of the prince. Perhaps he is aware that Christian tradition has recognized, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the One Whom the Psalmist described as "the most beautiful among the children of men" (Ps. 44: 3), Who has come to save the world by restoring to it its "former beauty." Thus we may deduce from the statement of the prince that it is Christ Himself Who is the Beauty which will save the world.

The genius of Dostoyevsky thus concurs with the philokalic vision of Nicodemus the Hagiorite, who continues, in his preface: "In the last days, in the bowels of His mercy, it pleased the Word of the Father, the divine Source, to cancel the counsels of the princes of darkness, and to go even further in implementing the old and true counsels he had established at the beginning. So becoming incarnate by the benevolence of the Father and the synergy of the Holy Spirit, He took Himself our whole nature and deified it. Then, having conferred upon us the divine working of His salutary commandments, and having granted us, through Baptism, the perfect grace of the Holy Spirit, he flowed into our hearts as a divine seed. According to the Evangelist, to us who govern our lives by his life-giving commandments and spiritual passages from one age to another, to us who by this exercise keep that unquenchable grace, He has given the power to ultimately bring forth the fruit, to become by this grace the children of God (cf. Jn. 1:12), and to be deified, attaining

⁷ Fedor Dostoïevski, *L'Idiot*. (Trad. française : Albert Mousset), Paris : Livre de Poche, 2010, p. 464.

to the perfect man, according to the measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13)."⁸

Thus, for Dostoyevsky and for Nicodemus, just as in the stories of the origins in the Greek Septuagint and their interpretation by the Fathers of the Church, beauty is inseparable from goodness. The beauty that saves is the beauty of God, in Whom truth, goodness and beauty are one and the same reality. Both have probably read the works attributed to Dionysius, the disciple of Saint Paul at the Areopagus (Acts 17: 34), but which, due to the strong influence of Proclus Neo-Platonism, we are obliged to consider as dating from the late fifth century. The Christian author who hides thus under the pseudonym of Dionysius indeed stresses in his treatise *The Divine Names*, which includes part of Proclus' treatise *De malorum subsistentia*, that beauty and goodness are one in God Who is their Source:

"This Goodness, the sacred theologians also celebrate, calling it Beautiful, Beauty, Love, Lovely, and all other divine names suitable for this freshness that is a source of beauty and full of grace. Assuredly one must not confuse *the beautiful* and *beauty* without considering this Source which unites all in one; in every being we indeed distinguish participation and the participated, calling good that which has participated in beauty and beauty that participation in this Source which makes up the beauty of all that is beautiful. But if we speak of the super-essentially Beautiful, He is also called Beauty because of this power to make beautiful which He imparts to every being according to the measure appropriate to each, because, like light, He shines on all things, to clothe them with beauty, the effusions of the radiating Source that springs from Himself, because, finally, He calls all to Himself - we also call Him Beautiful (*kallos*) - and He gathers within Himself all in all. But if He is called Beautiful, it is in the sense that He both contains all that is beautiful and surpasses all beauty; He remains eternally beautiful, a beauty identical to Himself and constant, which is neither born nor perishes, which neither grows nor decreases because it is not beautiful in this way and ugly in that, nor sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly, nor beautiful according to the points of view, or places or ways one may consider Him, but rather it is a constant beauty, which remains the same in and for Himself, bearing primordially within Himself and in a transcendent fashion the original Source of all beauty."⁹

Thus, if the created world is at once good and beautiful, it is because it was created by God Who is both beautiful and good and it participates in Him. The Creator is, for Dionysius, the Cause and the Source of the beauty and goodness of creation:

"For in this simple and wonderful nature, common to every beautiful being, it is not the beautiful or beauty that pre-exist in unique form as if they were their own cause. It is this Beauty that grants everyone to be beautiful according to the proportion that belongs to them; it is this Beauty that produces all propriety, all friendship, all communion; it is this Beauty that produces all unity and is a universal principle because He creates and moves all beings and keeps them, giving them a loving desire for their own beauty. For each one He constitutes the bounds and the object of their love, since He is their ultimate cause - for it is out of Goodness that everything is made - and their model - for it is according to His image that everything is defined. The Beautiful also merges with the Good because, whatever the motive that moves beings, it is always towards the Beautiful and the Good that they tend, and there is nothing that does not participate in the Beautiful and the

⁸ Nicodème l'Hagiorite, *Op. cit.*, p. 35-36.

⁹ Denys l'Aréopagite, *Les Noms divins* IV, 7. PG 3, 701C-704A. Trad. française : M. De Gandillac, Paris, 1943, p. 100-101.

Good. We must audaciously push on to say that even non-being itself also participates in the same Beautiful and Good, because it is a beautiful and good thing to celebrate it in God through the negation of all attributes."¹⁰

It is this beauty and goodness of the divine Creator prompting all communion that induces the creation to commune and unite with Him. It is what makes unity, communion and love between created beings possible, but is also the reason for their distinction. The Areopagite continues:

"Thus this altogether beautiful and good One is the cause of all the multitude of the beautiful and the good. It is through Him that all things subsist in their essences, that they are united and distinct, identical and opposite, like and unlike, that opposites are in communion and united elements avoid confusion. It is thanks to Him that the superior exercise their providence, that equals bond with each other, that the subordinate are converted, that everything keeps steadfast unity and stability. And is thanks to Him again, that each communes each other, that beings sympathize and love each other without losing themselves in each other, that everything is in harmony, that diverse parties come to agree and bond indissolubly with each other..."¹¹

In traditional Byzantine iconography of the creation stories of Genesis, as we can see for example in the well-known mosaics of the Monreale Cathedral in Sicily, the creative Word God is depicted as Christ. It is thus is He, "the Fairest of the sons of men" (Ps. 44: 3), Who not only is the Beauty that will save the world, but also the Beautiful and Good Who created it and saw that what He had created was, at once, good and beautiful. He is not only the Saviour, but also the Image of God, according to which the human being, Adam, was created. As the Apostle Paul says, He is "the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, for it is in Him that all things in heaven and on earth, were created, the visible and the invisible, the Thrones, Dominions, Principalities and Powers; all things were created through Him and for him. He is before all things and all things hold together in Him "(Col. 1: 15-17). Thus, in Christian consciousness, the end is joined with the beginning. Christ, the incarnate Word of God, is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1: 8). He is the Beautiful and the Good which made a good and beautiful world. He is the Beauty which will save the world.

God in all things and all things in God

But back to the topic of our discussion. What is the theological significance of the beauty of creation? Is the beauty of it simply the reflection of God's beauty? Is the cosmos that God saw as both beautiful and good both at the time of its creation, not simply an image of the Beautiful and Good God?

Commenting on the stories of Genesis in the fourth century AD, John Chrysostom emphasizes that the splendor of creation speaks of God in a manner understandable to all. He writes: "The sky is beautiful, but it is so in order that you may bow down before Him who made it; the sun is bright, but it is so in order that you may worship its author; if you stop at the wonder of creation and get stuck at the beauty of these works, the light became dark for you, or rather you have used the light to change it to darkness."¹² Thus the true significance of the beauty of creation is simply to show us the way to the Creator. And for him, the beauty of the material world would be secondary to the beauty of the spiritual world. "If indeed,"

¹⁰ *Ibid.* PG 3, 704A-B. De Gandillac, p. 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.* PG 3, 704B-C. De Gandillac, p. 101-102.

¹² Jean Chrysostome, *Sur la Genève*, Sermon I. SC 433, Paris, 1998, p. 145.

he said, "we contemplate the Craftsman by regarding His creatures, He shall prove to be much greater than these celestial beings. The sky is beautiful, but it is not as beautiful as an angel; the sun is bright, but it is not as bright an archangel."¹³ And he said, if God has chosen to lead us to Him by the contemplation of a lower beauty it is due to human weakness and idolatry, because of "men who worshiped crocodiles, dogs and monkeys, whom "it was not possible to bring to the Artisan by the highest road".¹⁴

At the same time, a Cappadocian, Basil of Caesarea, also thought that the beauty of creation was to meant raise us to the Creator. In his homilies on the first story of Genesis, he stressed that the visible beauty of creation reveals the hidden beauty of the Creator: "If, sometimes, on a serene night, fixing your gaze on the indescribable beauty of the stars, you have thought of the Author of the universe, [asking yourself] Who embroidered the firmament out of these flowers, and how, in the visible world, credit gives way to necessity; if instead you have, during the day, considered with a thoughtful mind the wonders of the day, and from things visible, have conjectured about those invisible, you are becoming a listener who is prepared and worthy of contemplating this venerable and blessed assembly".¹⁵ To this, he adds that the beauty of the material and temporal creation is much inferior to the beauty of the invisible and eternal world: "For if these are the temporal goods that will be eternal? And if things visible are so beautiful, what will the invisible be like? Certainly, if the sky size exceeds the extent of human understanding, what intelligence can discover the nature of that which is eternal? If the perishable sun is so beautiful, [...] what will be the beauty of the Sun of Righteousness?"¹⁶

His brother, Gregory of Nyssa, considered the beauty of creation to be like a reflection in a mirror of the divine Beauty Who is its prototype. In his treatise on the creation of man, he wrote: "The deity is the Supreme Good, towards which tend all beings possessed of the desire of the Good. That is why our mind, made in the image of the perfect Good, retains, as long as it is in union with Him, the resemblance to its Model and remains firmly established in the Good; but when it falls away, it is stripped of its original beauty. And as we say that the mind derives its perfection from its resemblance to the beautiful Prototype of all minds, as a mirror receives a form by the impression of the object that appears in it, by similar reasoning we say that nature, led by the mind, becomes attached to Him, and gets her own embellishment from that Beauty placed near her, as though it were a mirror of the Mirror (*eikôn eikonos*)."¹⁷

For this reason, we consider the creation to be an Icon of God. Indeed, in the Orthodox tradition, Icons of Christ and the Saints are seen as images of their prototypes. In response to the Byzantine iconoclasm, wherein some saw in the veneration of holy Icons as a kind of idolatry, the Second Nicene Council resumed the distinction made by Basil of Caesarea four centuries earlier between image and prototype. It stated that "the honor rendered to the Icon goes to its prototype",¹⁸ that is to say, it is not directed at the material image, but, through it, rises to its

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Basile de Césarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, Sixième homélie. SC 26bis, Paris, 1968, p. 327.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329-331.

¹⁷ Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l'homme* XII. SC 6, Paris, 2002, p. 131.

¹⁸ Basile de Césarée, *Traité du Saint-Esprit*, XVIII, 45. PG 32, 149C.

intangible model. This distinction has helped to make a difference between the Icon and the idol, and thereby made possible, in Orthodox tradition, the veneration of images keeping it safe from any charge of idolatry. On the basis of the patristic texts we have just mentioned, we may now show a similarity between creation and Icons. Indeed, if we can see the created world as an icon of the Creator, then we must honor and respect it in the same way as we do the holy Icons and then the honor and respect paid to the creation will be forwarded to Creator. It is obviously not a case of worshipping nature, but of honoring the Creator through the creation because His beauty is reflected in it.

However it would be wrong to limit the theological significance of the beauty of creation solely to this perspective which joins the Platonic vision in considering the sensible world as a reflection in a mirror of the intelligible world, the world of ideas. Indeed, we find in a Christian writer of the second century, Justin Martyr, a very interesting theological development that is not without interest in the subject that concerns us today. An apologist for Christianity in response to pagan accusations, Justin took up the Stoic concept of the "*logos spermatikos*" that is to say of the "seminal word" to explain that the creative Word, the Logos, that Christianity came to identify with Christ was present as a Seed in all creatures. Thus, human beings are in possession of a seed of the divine Logos. According to him, "the seed of the Word is innate in the human race."¹⁹ This made it possible for him to say that it was from Him that the pagan philosophers had drawn their wisdom and so had participated in the preparation for the Gospel. Justin wrote his first apology: "For it is not only through the Greeks and by the mouth of Socrates that the Word has thus declared the truth; but the barbarians, too, were enlightened by the same Word, wearing a sensible form, and become the Man called Jesus Christ."²⁰ However, since they were not in possession of the Logos in His entirety, Justin believes that their understanding was only partial: "In all of them we find seeds of truth; but what proves that they have not understood is that they contradict themselves."²¹ Justin thus explains the superiority of Christianity over pagan philosophy by the incarnation of the Word which Christians possess in His entirety: "Our doctrine surpasses human doctrine, because we have all the Word in Christ, Who appeared for us, Body, Word and Soul. All right principles that philosophers and legislators have discovered and expressed, they owe to what they found and partially contemplated in the Word. It is because they have not known all the Word, which is Christ, that they often contradicted to themselves."²² It is through His incarnation in Jesus Christ that the Logos reveals Himself in fullness. Justin says: "Socrates knew Christ in part because He was the Word, and He is the One Who is in all things, Who predicts the future through the prophets, and personally took on our nature to teach us these things; Christ brought enlightenment not only to philosophers and scholars, but also to craftsmen and to all the ignorant in general, who, for Him, despised opinion and fear and death; for He is the virtue of the ineffable Father and not a production of human reason."²³

The notion of the "*logos spermatikos*" developed by Justin about Christ, the Creator-Logos, the "One that is in all," gives us an important reading key to understanding

¹⁹ Justin, *2^e Apologie* VIII, 1.

²⁰ Justin, *1^{ère} Apologie* V, 4.

²¹ Justin, *1^{ère} Apologie* XLIV, 10.

²² Justin, *2^e Apologie* X, 1-3.

²³ Justin, *2^e Apologie* X, 8.

the theological sense of the beauty of creation. In this vision of Justin, the creation is not only a reflection or image of divine beauty, but holds in itself the seed of divinity, a portion of that beauty which thereby makes it beautiful in itself. The Logos, which is the Beautiful and the Good, identified with Christ, "the Fairest of the sons of men" (Ps. 44: 3), is present in everything, in all creation. The beauty of creation finds its meaning not only as a reflection of the divine Beauty, but as the very presence of this Beauty and Goodness in everything.

However, we must distinguish this worldview from the pantheistic vision. It is not a question, as it is in the case of pantheism, to consider the creation as divine, to assume that everything is God and God is everything, and thus to worship nature. In Christianity, there is a clear distinction between creation and the Creator. Justin's teaching rather develops the *panentheistic* approach, which sees God in all things and all things in God.

The notion of "*logoi*" in creation, which was the basis for the notion of divine energies in the fourth century, was taken over by Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century. For Maximus, the *Logos* (Word) is a multitude of divine *logoi* (words) that are not Platonic ideas, which exist separately from God, but God Himself in His prescience and providence. He wrote: "For who, considering with reason and wisdom the beings brought by God from non-being to being, whereby he leads his soul to contemplation through the infinite variety of the beings in nature, and discerns on reflecting and scrutinizing the Word by Whom they are created, does not see that the Word is one and multiple, distinguished indivisibly in the diversity of created beings and, in their particularity, unmingled with them and in them? [...] Having established before the ages the *logoi* of beings created in His good will, by them He founded the visible and invisible creation with reason and wisdom from non-being, having done and doing everything at the suitable time for all and for each".²⁴ Maximus also emphasizes that, through the creating Word (*Logos*) and the *logoi* of created beings, God is present in every creature and every creature finds itself in God and is turned towards God: "Every reason-endowed human and angel, by the same *logos* with which it was created and which is in God, is in God, turned towards God, and may also be said to have its part in God and is of God through its *logos* which pre-exists in God."²⁵ For Maximus, creation is not the result of a fall, as it is in Platonism, but rather a call to creation to ascension to God. Thus, the deification of man responds to the initial project of the creation of the world by God as described in the stories of origin. For Maximus, the future of the human being is in God in whom the *logos* of his being pre-exists. Therefore, the human being "does not flow back to God, but rather by their upward directedness, they become god and are called part of God by participation as is fitting" and therefore "the return and ascension back to their *logoi* in which they were created, their movement, in view of the divine project, finds its bounds in the same project that is its goal."²⁶ In the Christian view, the end links up with the beginning, eschatology links up with protology, the ultimate goal links up with the narratives of origin.

To see God in all things and all things in God, as do Justin or Maximus, has immediate consequences for the understanding of the beauty of creation. Creation is beautiful not only because it is the work and the reflection of the Beautiful and

²⁴ Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambigua* 7. Trad. française E. Ponsoye. Paris, 1994, p. ***.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the Good, but because the Beautiful and the Good is present in it, and invites it back to be in communion with Him. This link of presence and participation between the creature and the Creator brings us to the sacramentality of creation, a theme put forward by a famous Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century, Alexander Schmemmann. The latter states that "in the early chapters of Genesis, we find a clear affirmation of the sacramental character in the world. God created the world, and then man. He gave the world to man as food and drink. The world was God's gift to us, existing not for itself, but to be transformed, to become life, and to be offered in return as a human gift to God."²⁷ For him, the "original sin" of the narratives of Genesis is precisely the forgetting or the alteration of this sacramental worldview.

For him, man is not only the guardian of creation. Taking up the idea developed by Gregory the Theologian that man is the link between the material world and the spiritual world, Schmemmann says that "man was created as a priest; the world was created as a matter of the Sacrament. But sin came, broke this unit: it was not a matter simply of breaking the rules, but rather the loss of vision, the abandonment of a Sacrament. Fallen man saw the world as a thing secular and profane and religion as something completely separate, private, remote and 'spiritual'. The sacramental meaning of the world was lost. The man forgot the priesthood that was the purpose and meaning of his life. He ended by seeing himself as a dying body in a cold and foreign world."²⁸

By giving up this vocation to be the priest of creation, man disfigures the beauty of creation by cutting it off from the origin of its beauty and denying the presence in it of the divine seed of the Beautiful and the Good. He then drags it into a mad rush of the abuse of wealth, unbridled consumption of resources and selfish use of its wealth, making it ugly and polluted. Therefore, our forgetfulness of the sacramentality of the world, our blindness to the beauty of creation and our insensitivity to the presence of the Beautiful and the Good in us as in all other creatures, makes us lose sight of the real purpose our existence which is our progress towards our fellowship with, and participation in the Beautiful and the Good, which Christian tradition has recognized in the Person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God the Creator. Conversely, to recognize the theological significance of the beauty of creation is not simply to acquiesce to the accounts of the origins of our civilization, but to respond positively to our vocation which will find its fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, let us again cite Alexander Schmemmann, who was well aware of this eschatological perspective of this beautiful, sacramental creation: "A sacramental correspondence is not the same as an identification. It points ever further. It also creates this unity, making us witnesses not only of the death of Christ but also of His return, and the fulfillment of all things in Him. With thanksgiving, we accept from God's hands His beautiful garden which is the world. We eat of its fruits, transform its substance into life, offer this life to God on the Cross of Christ and our daily altars, and expect His ownership, as the risen Body in his Kingdom. But it will be the *same* world, the *same* life. '*Behold, I make all things new*' (Rev. 21: 5). These were the final words that God addressed to us but they express, at the end, what was in His mind from the start, when He looked at the sacramental world of His

²⁷ A. Schmemmann, « The World as Sacrament », *Church, World, Mission*. Crestwood, NY, 1979, p. 223.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

creation and saw that it was good.²⁹ Such is the profound theological significance of the beauty of creation: to recognize the intimate communion between the creation and its Creator by the sacramental bond which makes God present in all things and all things must be oriented towards God

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.