

Your Grace Transforms the Universe, Part Two

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

To Receive the World as a Gift

The universe is the vine that God gave to mankind. Saint John Chrysostom says, “All things were made for our sake, but we were not made for them.” Everything is a gift from God to man, evidence of His love. Everything testifies to the sap of God’s love—His kindness, His grace—and transmits it to us. So everything carries this gift, the gift of divine love. Every gift that we exchange with each other is a sign and bearer of love. But every gift calls for another gift in return, for the exchange of love to be achieved. However, man has nothing to offer God except what was given to him, for his needs. Therefore, his gift is a sacrifice that he presents to God, as an act of thanksgiving. Man’s gift to God is a sacrifice and a “Eucharist” in the most comprehensive sense, according to Fr. Dumitru Staniloae.

The transformation of the world, its transfiguration, begins with our receiving it as grateful believers, grateful for God's everlasting kind stance toward us. It is not without significance that the Eucharist is the most central and important ritual for Christians. Unfortunately, Christians today give the Sacrament of the Eucharist different names, and by neglecting to call it “The Sacrament of Thanksgiving,” they forget that thanksgiving is the foundation of their faith.

Man can bless and praise God for the sake of the world. He can present the world to God as an act of thanksgiving. We say in the Sacrament of Thanksgiving, “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee in behalf of all and for all.”

Likewise, man is capable of reshaping and modifying the world, giving it a new—entirely new—meaning. “He imprints Creation with the seal of his understanding and perceptive action. The world, for man, is more than a gift; it is a task” (Father Dumitru Staniloae). It is worth mentioning here that in the sacrament of thanksgiving, we offer not sheaves of wheat but, rather, a prepared loaf, and we offer not clusters of grapes but, rather, aged wine.

Man provides material things a voice with which Creation can glorify God, whether through cultivating the land or through other professions—through his writings or even painting icons. The first task assigned to man was to give names to the living creatures (Genesis 2:19–20). As long as we do not give a name to an object or an

experience, a precise word for its real significance, then we cannot begin to understand or use it.

Man, then, is the priest of Creation because he has the authority to give thanks to God and to offer Him Creation anew. He is also the king of Creation because he has the power to shape and fabricate it, to unite and divide it. Saint Leontios of Cyprus gracefully describes these two tasks, royal and priestly, saying: "Across heaven, earth, and sea, through wood and stone, across all visible and invisible Creation, I honor the Creator, the Master and the skilled Craftsman." Creation does not directly and spontaneously honor its maker, but through me. The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and through me the moon worships Him and the stars glorify Him, just as rainwater, dewdrops, and all created things glorify and honor God.

A person does not approach this role through force but, rather, through the light of his spiritual vision. His call is not to dominate nature or to exploit it but, rather, to exalt and sanctify it.

Should We Seek a Peaceful World or the Kingdom of God?

The Church understands its mission to be that of a spiritual hospital, restoring spiritual health to man and building immunity against the deadly disease of sin.

When you create a healthy human being, everything is set on a good foundation. And when you make a saint, you give the possibility of sanctification not only to the saint but to everyone who is around him and everything in his orbit.

Based on this, the transfiguration of the world begins from man and in man, since man is a "miniature universe." God commissioned him to reconcile the spiritual kingdom with the material kingdom and to make harmony between them. He must combine them. He must spiritualize the material and reveal all the potential latent in the created system. Man's vocation, in particular, is to show the spiritual in and through the material.

When a people regain the image of God, the thought of God resides in them. Thus, they no longer act according to their own will, which is contaminated with deviant whims, but rather by the will of God, which puts their whims on the right path.

In this respect, the liberation of man and Creation becomes liberation from all the evil forces that controlled them as a result of sin. So, the liberation of woman, for

example, becomes a restoration of her position as a creature in the image and likeness of God, who has her own role and her own message. It shouldn't be a response to human rights movements that call for mere equality with men in terms of rights, for her to turn into another man, and for the distortion of her special role as a female.

The fight against hunger in poor countries does not just become a matter of filling empty stomachs; nor does a political struggle merely aim to liberate the country from bad external or internal domination, but rather, it becomes a struggle to restore the kingdom of love lost as a result of the prevalence of sin and humanity's accumulated fall.

In the same sense, peace becomes, not just the absence of violence and threats of war, but rather, the presence of God in us—inner happiness and serenity that are not disturbed by turmoil of life, no matter how intense it is.

There is rather a huge difference between those who serve merely for the sake of human rights and those who serve in order to transform the earth into an image of the Kingdom of God. The method of service varies, as well as its starting points.

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