

## Why should we protect the *Scolitantides orion* (the Chequered Blue)?

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There is no need to introduce this article with dire descriptions of climate change or mass extinction. All of this is well known and information about details can be easily found in reports and newspaper articles. I shall therefore immediately move on to my topic. First, I shall identify the species mentioned in the title of this article. The *Scolitantides orion* is a small, blue-winged butterfly that may be found (as far as we know) in only a couple of localities in Norway.<sup>1</sup> The number of localities and specimen have declined dramatically since the 1970s due to overgrowth and local building projects. Building houses without properly investigating the biodiversity of a region may be one of the main reasons for the decline. But why should we protect a tiny species of butterfly that most people have never seen and not heard of? I shall argue here that natural species have intrinsic value and should be protected even if that puts restrictions on human activity. I base these claims on a cosmology and metaphysics that is mainly inspired by my reading of Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor. The task I have set for myself is not to give precise or “correct” interpretations of these two thinkers, but rather to develop an argument inspired by their thought. I should also add that I do not appeal to such a cosmology and metaphysics as a late antique doctrine but rather as a *metaphysical* doctrine that can be adapted and defended in the 21st century. However, the limits set for this article do not allow me to develop a defence here. I therefore state my principles as presuppositions that I take for granted.

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<sup>1</sup> It is still found in continental Europe, but I know nothing of its frequency. I have already written an article with the title “Why should we protect the *Parnassius Apollo*”. In the present article I use another example as a starting point for a more developed argument for the protection of threatened species and the environment.

## Presuppositions

I build my argument on basic orthodox Christian presuppositions.

- (1) God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, creates the totality of beings (the universe).
- (2) Creation is based on a divine plan.
- (3) The divine purpose for creatures is that they shall be brought to participate in God in order to be transformed into a glorified or deified condition. The term “creature” is used in this article in the sense of anything created, animate or inanimate.

These points have certain implications that will be further explicated below.

## Some earlier contributions

In 2007 a conference was held at the St Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Centre of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, “in order to explore scholarly perspectives of our relationship toward the natural environment”.<sup>2</sup> The conference resulted in the anthology *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration, Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*.<sup>3</sup> The quality and relevance of the contributions of this anthology are uneven. Some make no progress at all towards an “ecothology”, i.e. a theological doctrine of ecology. However, there are valuable papers as well. Louth shows how Maximus’ cosmology calls for a “humanized world”, a term that probably is greatly disturbing for many environmentalists. Louth also points out:<sup>4</sup> “Because human beings participate in the divine Logos, they are *logikos* and are therefore capable of discerning meaning, that is, *logos*: they are capable of discerning the *logoi* of creation, the whole depth of meaning that can be found in all its manifold splendour.” We return to both topics below, the humanized world and the “meaning” of creation. Zizioulas introduces the, I would claim, fruitful idea of the human being as the “priest of creation”, a term I shall adapt to my own purpose. The

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<sup>2</sup> Chryssavgis and Foltz (New York 2013), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, Fordham University Press, New York 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Louth in Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013), 64.

essay gathered from Sherrard's writings is challenging and valuable. I return to it below. However, the most promising contribution in my opinion, even if the most abstract or metaphysical, is Perl's description of features of the hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite.

### The epistemic condition

Modern attitudes towards nature and the environment are to a large degree shaped by the philosophical and scientific legacy having its roots in early modern thought. Throughout this history modern humans have learnt to separate mind and matter, value and science, belief (or faith) and reason. This development is to some perspicuous degree detrimental. Nature, emptied of divine vestiges and value, is transformed from being an expression of divine presence and purpose into something strangely "other", separated from God and humans, a simple "resource" that we may exploit as we like in accordance with the means of technical and industrial progress. Philosophical epistemology conceived the proper access to knowledge quantitatively and mathematically, and scientific method followed suit: the proper way to investigate being is to ask questions that can only be answered in quantitative terms. Modern science is built on metaphysical presuppositions that *methodologically* exclude the idea of the transcendent and spiritual from scientific discourse. In all social and technical development, human need and human desire play a major role. Quantity played into the hands of technology, the latter played into the hands of productivity, and the production of items to sustain *human* life and serve the *human* search for satisfaction of needs and enjoyment, became the first mover and credo in the development of modern society. Humans forgot the divine origin of the world. However, I claim that our inability to know (epistemologically) certain features of entities does not mean that these features have no being at all (ontologically). Sherrard says something thought-provoking about modern science:

There cannot be a science of things – of phenomena – that ignores the reality of phenomena, that by virtue of which they are what they are. There cannot be a valid science of the physical aspect of things alone, for the simple reason that the notion that things possess an outer physical aspect apart from their inner spiritual dimension is an illusory notion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sherrard (2013), 217.

Sherrard objects to a "science" that divides reality into two sides, the material and the spiritual, that may be studied apart from each other.<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is difficult to get acceptance for such a notion of science today:

To insist that we can obtain no genuine knowledge of the physical world unless we first attain a knowledge of spiritual or metaphysical realities is to provoke the accusation of obscurantism, if not plain dottiness: we tend to take it for granted that not only is it perfectly possible to obtain a knowledge of the physical world without any reference whatsoever to the idea of a God, or a Creator, or of any underlying transcendental or transspatial metaphysical reality but also that we must *not* allow such an idea to determine either the methods we employ in our search for knowledge or the substance of what we put forward as knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

If the presuppositions laid down at the beginning of this paper are true, which I hold them to be, such a view of the physical world and science lacks a basic insight and therefore risks distorting the understanding of being. As Sherrard clearly sees, to assert this is daring. However, to maintain nothing and to turn a blind eye to science or scientism when their claims go against such presuppositions and their implications, is cowardly. As trained in philosophy, I do not, of course, recommend credulity or in general the denial of the results of modern science. On the other hand, if one holds that there is a God who created the world with plan and purpose, one cannot uncritically accept naturalistic claims. True science needs to be evaluated within a comprehensive metaphysical framework that offers the ultimate explanation of the world.<sup>8</sup> Without this framework not only knowledge but political and economic structuring and development may fail in disastrous ways.

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<sup>6</sup> Sherrard (2013), 214-217.

<sup>7</sup> Sherrard (2013), 214-215.

<sup>8</sup> What is said above needs careful consideration. Science, for instance medical science, has brought us many benefits. However, if the basic metaphysical presuppositions of modern science are limited in perspective when one construes the nature of reality simply as quantitative, then something is missing. My main objection is that if this quantitative perspective is claimed to be universally valid, then it is one-sided and not true.

The “humanized world”

It was mentioned above that Maximus the Confessor’s cosmology, according to Louth, calls for a “humanized world”. I suppose Louth consciously avoided the term “anthropocentric”. Anthropocentrism suggests that only human beings have intrinsic value. In modern environmental philosophy, with which I agree in this regard, one considers this a very detrimental attitude. One often associates such an attitude with the legacy of early modern thought. Early modern philosophers emptied nature of value, with the exception of that which may be termed instrumental value. In the twentieth century, Heidegger, among others, criticised this metaphysical attitude and the scientism that followed in its footsteps. However, in the fundamental ontology of Heidegger, nature was still held to be devoid of intrinsic meaning and consequently devoid of any value that did not depend on the human subject, “Dasein”. “Dasein” discloses entities as “worldly” in the sense or meaning of being as *present-at-hand* (“vorhanden”) or *ready-to-hand* (“zuhanden”).<sup>9</sup> “Dasein” is the single source of meaning. The object, whatever it is, has meaning and value only as disclosed by the human being. Heidegger’s existential ontology and in general existentialism is not at all concerned with nature as having any intrinsic value. We still struggle with this way of looking at nature and natural entities in the twenty-first century.

Is Maximus’ “humanized world” the same as this anthropocentric world? I claim it is not. As we shall see below, there is meaning (*logos*) outside the sphere of how humans relate to the world. There is meaning in every creature since all creatures are somehow images of God’s *logoi*. There is not only meaning; there is value as well. All creatures have *intrinsic value* because they do not just exist; they exist for a divine purpose. In this purpose they are not simply made to serve as instruments for the sake of a human goal, they are themselves made to participate in the final transformation. In that case, human beings cannot exploit creatures indiscriminately.

Human beings are intelligent and because of this they discover the *meaning (logos)* of beings. However, the investigation of nature and its rational structure is in modern times coupled with productivity and productivity with economics and this promotes a system of profitability that seldom knows of other concerns or any limits. Nature belongs to those who appropriate it for the sake of production and has no purpose beyond itself. Nature becomes “resource” and the only

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<sup>9</sup> In *Sein und Zeit* “world” is a category (an “existential”) of being human, not a surrounding reality. The human being (“Dasein”) *is* being-in-the-world.

reason to protect it stems from the economic system of (more or less) organized consumerism itself, with its intrinsic inequalities and social injustice. If we take too much or are too greedy, nature strikes back and we end up with pollution, climate-change, poverty, etc. The simple idea that this nature should belong to the divinity, makes no impression on the forces that cry for increased productivity.

Modern environmentalists often consider anthropocentrism a morally suspect position. It seems to me, however, that the recent focus on climate-change enhances the anthropocentric attitude. One proclaims that we need to protect nature and to avoid global warming. But why? The reason seems mainly to be that it is because of our own future lives and for the sake of future generations. It seems difficult to argue that natural entities have any intrinsic value in a purely naturalistic perspective. Philosophers have tried to do so from deontological and utilitarian points of view, but such arguments suffer generally from a failure to establish an unshakable foundation. One could of course object that a theological argument as well lacks the power of being convincing, which is probably the case. However, whether we like it or not, so-called rational arguments rarely carry the day with the majority of people. I will stress that I said “so-called” rational arguments, since naturalists have no monopoly on reason. We need, on the other hand, a motivation that goes beyond a certain kind of “rational argument”, namely *a motivation built on the recovery of the sacred dimension of nature*.

### Cosmology

I turn now to describe some basic features of the cosmology and metaphysics that I presuppose in my further argument. Perl’s interpretation of Dionysius offers some valuable ideas. He shows that, according to Dionysius, God is “nothing” in the sense of not being any being.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Perl says that “he [God] is present to all things as the constitutive determinations or perfections in virtue of which they are what they are and so are beings”. Quoting Dionysius, he points out that God is “the life of living things and being of beings”.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between entities that are alive and entities that simply have being is the distinction between organic and inorganic entities

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<sup>10</sup> Perl (2013), 24.

<sup>11</sup> *De divinis nominibus* 1.3, in Suchla ed. (1990), 112.

and immediately one might think that when something is inorganic it drops out of the human sphere, its value decreases, and we may exploit it without any moral worries. However, in the Dionysian scheme, as shown by Perl, it is not like that at all. If, as he says, “all the perfections of all things are God-in-them”, no entity can be treated as if devoid of value.<sup>12</sup> The most striking claim Perl makes in his interpretation of Dionysius deserves being quoted in full:

All this indicates, all of these perfections – intellect, reason, life, and being – are in fact higher and lower modes of participation in God, or of God’s presence in beings. In plants, for instance, life is not superadded to being but is rather the higher mode of being proper to living things as distinct from inanimate ones. Consciousness, in animals, is not superadded to being and life but is the higher mode of being and life proper to them as conscious beings. At the highest level, therefore, intellection, the characteristic perfection of the angels, is the highest mode not only of consciousness but of life and being. Conversely, if life is a higher mode of being and consciousness a higher mode of life, then the life of plants is their lesser mode of what in animals is consciousness, and the mere being of inanimate things is a still lesser, weaker mode of what in animals and plants is consciousness and life.<sup>13</sup>

The following is also worth noticing: “Nothing is absolutely devoid of life and thought: living, for a plant, is its lesser mode of thinking, and merely existing, for a stone, is its lesser mode of thinking and living.”<sup>14</sup>

I claim, in my presuppositions, that God created the world (the universe) according to a plan. Let us say that this “plan” is a set of Ideas or Forms. We may call them, in accordance with Maximus the Confessor, divine *logoi* (plural of the Greek word *logos*). (If there is a divine Intelligence that created the universe, this seems reasonable to say.) Let us further say that these *logoi* are divine “predefinitions” of beings. As such, they are the eternal definitions of the essences that God wants to create. When creatures are made, they emerge as “images” of these *logoi*. Each creature, each particular and each kind, emerges with the kind of essence God wants it to have. That creatures “emerge” means that what is in God’s mind is brought forth from nothing by the

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<sup>12</sup> Perl (2013), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Perl (2013), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Perl (2013), 27.

divine power that activates creatures. This “activation” is given as a participation in God’s external manifestation of Being.

Participation is a key-term in the cosmological and metaphysical sketch I draw. This term needs clarification. I do not advocate a doctrine of pantheism as if I claimed that everything is God. Further, participation does not mean that a part of God is separated from Him, a part that is then absorbed into the being of a created entity. On the other hand, *God is everything and in everything in a qualified sense*. God is everything in the qualified sense that He contains in His thought or wisdom the *logoi* of all possible creatures. However, He is not everything in the sense of being the actual essence of beings. God is *in* everything as the power or activity by which beings have their kind of being. This is what participation means: that God is active in creatures.

We may look at the world as a hierarchy of beings that differ from each other because they are images of different *logoi*. The essences are designed in such a way that the activity of Being is actualized differently throughout the hierarchy. Each kind of essence has a pre-ordained delimited capacity for reception. We could consider an oversimplified chain of entities, like stones, plants, animals, and human beings. (Of course, within the groups of stones, plants, and animals there are numerous species and genera with different capacities. However, in order to explain the hierarchy, the simplified chain suffices.) Stones receive the activity of Being that expands all the specific and generic potentialities inherent in the diverse essences of stone. At the level of plants, Being expands the potentialities into life in its diversity according to each species. At the level of animals, Being expands the potentialities into sentient life in accordance with the pre-ordained essences of animal diversity. At the level of human beings, Being expands the potentialities into intellectual life in accordance with the essence of humans. It is one and the same divine activity that expands into diverse modes of being (being, life, sentient life, intellectual life) in accordance with the capacities of creatures.

The metaphysical sketch given above claims that there is continuity throughout the whole universe. This continuity is divinely established. Even so, created potentialities are actualized differently within the different species and genera of beings. It is not as if creatures, ontologically speaking, are radically separated from one another. The basic elements of created reality are differentiated in accordance with the divine scheme. The same divine activity actualizes the different levels and unites them into a whole. One may look at things from a purely naturalistic



point of view: the same basic “stuff” results in a complex nature of inanimate and animate things, through complex physical processes and immense spans of time. My metaphysical or theological sketch points to the ontological framework within which this is possible.

Metaphysically speaking, if the activity that “energizes” the diverse modes of being that constitute the universe is one and the same, then this universe is totally dependent on God and belongs to the maker as a work of divine art. If an artist makes a work of art, let us say a painting, nobody has the right to appropriate the painting and tear it apart if the artist does not allow him to do so. It seems obvious that if this is the case, then, to a much greater degree, human beings cannot treat the world and its inventory as if they were their own property. Even if God should allow humans to make some use of what is found in the world, such use should be regulated by certain moral limits. If in addition to this the world is made with the divine purpose of being glorified or deified, then there must obviously be limits as to how creatures may handle or treat other creatures.

#### The sacred dimension of nature

The cosmological sketch given above makes it possible to recover the sacred dimension of nature. A colleague of mine, professor Vetlesen, has stated a claim for panspsychism as a possible way to achieve a change of attitude towards nature in a recent book, *Cosmologies of the Anthropocene*. Vetlesen says the claim for panspsychism has an easy and a difficult part. The first point has to do with the definition of the concept:

The easy part is to do with the claim that everything that exists exhibits mind, by which is meant (in various degrees, from the primitive to the most advanced) mentality, interiority, intelligence, and purposiveness. To postulate as much on behalf of “everything” is, however, so radical a thought as to be beyond what we can ever hope to settle. Does a stone possess properties of the kind meant here? Is there anything mind-like about a such a thing as a stone at all? Isn’t there, in fact, only so many properties excluding everything we associate with mind, and so with agency insofar as we take agency to presuppose and require mind – a capacity for thought – for intentionality, for the non-arbitrary pursuit of goals, and the like?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Vetlesen (2019), 10.

The difficult part is to avoid conceptual confusion and sweeping claims about entities so different in kind as stones, plants, animals, and humans. According to Vetlesen, advanced species (dolphins or chimpanzees) may exhibit mental capacities:

Hence, they are able, in some measure or other, to engage communicatively with us (betraying that we are engaged in shamelessly anthropocentric comparison, and how could we not be?). But we may not, and likely never will, gain the same knowledge about the mental qualities of stones and molecules, or of creeks and peccaries.<sup>16</sup>

Vetlesen claims further that our inability to know (epistemologically) certain features of entities does not mean that these features have no being at all (ontologically):<sup>17</sup> “it does not follow from humans’ *not knowing* whether nonhuman beings of various kinds possess the same (largely intellectual) capacities that we do, that we may treat them as though they don’t.” I shall not here argue for or against panpsychism. Many theologians would probably consider such a doctrine heretical despite the fact that Scripture encourages inanimate nature to praise God (Ps 148):

Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
 Praise Him in the heights!  
 Praise Him, all His angels;  
 Praise Him all His hosts!  
 Praise Him, sun and moon;  
 Praise Him, all you stars of light!  
 Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,  
 And you waters above the heavens!  
 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
 For He commanded and they were created.  
 He also established them forever and ever;  
 He made a decree which shall not pass away.  
 Praise the Lord from the earth,

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<sup>16</sup> Vetlesen (2010), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Vetlesen (2019), 13.

You great sea creatures and all the depths;  
 Fire and hail, snow and clouds;  
 Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;  
 Mountains and all hills;  
 Fruitful trees and all cedars;  
 Beasts and all cattle;  
 Creeping things and flying fowl;  
 Kings of the earth and all peoples;  
 Princes and all judges of the earth;  
 Both young men and maidens;  
 Old men and children.  
 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
 For His name alone is exalted;  
 His glory is above the earth and the heaven.  
 And He has exalted the horn of His people,  
 The praise of all His saints –  
 Of the children of Israel,  
 As people near to Him.  
 Praise the Lord!

Of course, modern exegesis has the means to make such formulas harmless by neutralizing their impact on the mind: this is simply a literary device called “animation” or maybe “personification”. It is, in short, not to be taken literally. It is, therefore, of no consequence and can simply be ignored. Sherrard says:<sup>18</sup> “When we look at the world, what we see is a reflection of our own mind, of our own mode of consciousness.” Since the mind of modern humans is petrified in its consumerist attitude, nature is experienced as devoid of life and value, devoid of sacredness. If we return to Perl’s interpretation of Dionysius above, we get another picture: there is a *continuity* of goodness and being that is manifest in stones, plants, animals, humans, and angels. Perl says (repeating the quotation from above): “Nothing is absolutely devoid of life and thought: living, for a plant, is its lesser mode of thinking, and merely existing, for a stone, is its lesser mode of thinking and

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<sup>18</sup> Sherrard (2013), 211.

living.”<sup>19</sup> I agree with Vetlesen: if our measure is modern epistemology there may be something here that we do not know and probably never will know. On the other hand, that does not mean that it cannot *be*. Perl’s interpretation is intriguing and inspiring, but I admit that there are challenges: how are we to understand the plant’s life as a lesser mode of thinking or a stone’s existence as a lesser mode of thinking and living? Is it despite this possible to access such primitive levels of being? It seems that the possibility is open for an animistic or a religious attitude.<sup>20</sup> One may reject animism as heretical but the idea of continuity in the scale of being and the sacredness of divine vestiges in all entities cannot be rejected from a Christian point of view. If all creatures are instantiated from divine *logoi*, the traces of the divine are accessible in both animate and inanimate nature. Divine activity interpenetrates the whole world, and this activity activates creatures in being, life, sensation, thinking, and joins them together. It is therefore possible to find and experience God, present in these activities, in all creatures. Since the divine power is one, the potentialities (the possible *kinds* of essential being) it activates are present in all creatures even if they are manifested hierarchically.<sup>21</sup>

If this is so, then not even a stone is a piece of inanimate stuff we may use at random. We are, in all probability, allowed to use it, but not without recognizing the one who created it. The same is the case with plants, like those we grow for food. They are living substances in which God is actively present giving them life. In the animal kingdom this divine power of being is manifest in an even larger degree. In humans (and to a higher degree in angels) the same power is manifest in intellectual life. There are three challenges that we must consider below. First, how shall we interpret the words addressed to humans in Genesis (1:28): “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Secondly, how shall we awaken people’s awareness for the sacred in nature? Thirdly, how do we discover the norms and limits of human behaviour?

Dominion?

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<sup>19</sup> Perl (2013), 27.

<sup>20</sup> I should add, to avoid confusion, that Vetlesen’s argument is not religious in the sense I use the term here. He does not appeal to a theological world-view.

<sup>21</sup> I am in the process of writing a new book on St Maximus the Confessor in which I devote a chapter to his whole/part thinking according to which all creatures are essentially interconnected.

The Biblical narrative has impacted many Christians. It is therefore important to suggest a reasonable interpretation of these words from Genesis. There are two terms in the text quoted above that need special attention. These are the terms “subdue” and “have dominion”. In Greek (the Septuagint) we find the verbs κατακυριεύω and ἄρχω. The first means to exercise dominion while the second means to rule. Since to exercise dominion over and to rule the animal kingdom have rather ominous connotations for many people today, one may feel tempted to reinterpret the terms to mean something nicer, like instituting a kind of stewardship. However, one needs some kind of justification for such an interpretation. I think it may be justified in the following way: God communicated these words before the fall, and they are therefore valid within the context of the condition of innocence. In that condition human beings acted innocently, virtuously. There was no evil, no cruelty, no inflicting of pain. We should therefore understand “to subdue” and “to dominate” in accordance with that particular situation. For this reason, the notion of “stewardship” may be adequate. However that may be, after the age of innocence, the *understanding* of the terms deteriorates in accordance with human desire and a vicious way of life, into something much more sinister. I suggest that these words from Genesis, about human reproduction and dominion over living things, are not valid for the present age. Unrestrained multiplication of the human species and unlimited consumption, are not, I claim, divinely ordained.

### Awareness

In the anthology *Towards an ecology of Transfiguration*, there are several papers that comment on orthodox liturgical practises. Oil, water, wine, and bread are sanctified and used sacramentally. In the words of Chryssavagis:<sup>22</sup> “It is crucial, then, that we recall the sacramental dimension of the world, recognizing that nothing is merely secular or profane.” The liturgical actions and the liturgical mentality of the eastern orthodox tradition is by some contributors to the anthology taken to show a more benign attitude towards nature than what we find in the “western” tradition. However, Geschwandtner challenges this sacramental approach in a paper, “Grounding Ecological Action in Orthodox Theology and Liturgical Praxis? A Call for Further Thinking”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Chryssavagis (2013), 160.

<sup>23</sup> Geschwandtner (2018).

How exactly does lifting of the chalice with human-produced wine and consuming a bit of diluted bread on a Sunday morning convince people to abstain from any particular ecologically damaging practice on Monday or more generally to advocate on behalf of preserving the habitats of species going extinct at an alarming rate?<sup>24</sup>

She claims that “there is little to support the sweeping claim that the East had a more benign view of nature than the West” and remarks (in a footnote) that “Countries with Orthodox heritage are among the most polluted on the planet”.<sup>25</sup> Even if that is so, she also states:

It is not necessarily problematic to seek to ground practical actions in a liturgical ethos, but much more theological work has to be done to explain the connection between certain liturgical phases or actions and concrete social or environmental action.<sup>26</sup>

Geschwandtner’s critical remarks are important. It seems to me correct to point out that whatever “cosmic” or “natural” or “ecological” implications one might draw from liturgical consciousness and practices, something is still missing. (One may even question whether a “liturgical consciousness” is typical for orthodox peoples.) There seems to be no immediate transition from practicing orthodoxy to practicing ecology. On the other hand, if one applies the cosmological and metaphysical legacy of Dionysius and Maximus as keys to liturgical experience, then one might be able to disclose the sacred dimension of what is outside of the church-building, namely nature. The awareness of God’s presence in all beings is, one might hope, a key to treat all things carefully, considerately, and with due respect. In Maximus’ scheme human beings are not just participants in a liturgical action, as such participants they are essentially connected with all levels of created being and have the practical task of uniting creatures with God.<sup>27</sup> However, the challenge is to connect liturgy with the actual perception that all creatures are created to participate in the final

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<sup>24</sup> Geschwandtner (2018), 69.

<sup>25</sup> Geschwandtner (2018), 64. Here it is tempting to remark that Norwegians (who live in a highly secularized society) seem to have a much more developed ecological consciousness than inhabitants in many orthodox countries.

<sup>26</sup> Geschwandtner (2018), 69-70.

<sup>27</sup> One may for instance consult his *Mystagogia*.

goal: glorification or deification. A change of attitude, of mentality, is called for. This does not come of itself. Orthodox Christians need to be educated by those who are familiar with the sacred dimension of nature. It will be the task of priests, of preachers, to promote this vision. I believe one needs to develop a contemplative attitude. However, “contemplation” is considered a somewhat elevated or esoteric state in the systems of spiritual development. What I advocate here is not of such an elevated kind. It should be possible to develop the awareness (empathy) and to learn, when one comes across a nice piece of stone or mineral, a butterfly, a beautiful plant, or a wild or tame animal, that God is present in these beings and that they reflect something of the divine.

### The priest of creation

I am not going to present Zizioulas’ concept of the human being as the priest of creation.<sup>28</sup> Rather I am going to use the term to develop some notions of norms and limits of human behaviour. In this connection I shall also comment further on Louth’s notion of Maximus’ “humanized world”.

I stated as one of my presuppositions that the world is created for a definite purpose. In *Ambiguum* 41, Maximus presents a sketch of a soteriological scheme. Human nature is created as interconnected with all other creatures with the task of *practically* uniting all creatures in itself in order to connect them with God. This is Maximus’ “humanized world”. In such a perspective, there are no vicious practises and no tyranny. However, the human being did not realize what God had ordained. Therefore, it is as the human nature of God incarnate that the purpose can be achieved. Human beings may participate in the regenerative work of the God-man by being integrated into the church as the body of Christ.

It is at this stage one usually will talk about the “sacramental dimension”. However, the sacramental dimension is of no avail if not coupled with a sacramental *consciousness* and a sacramental *practice*. If the ecclesial renewal shall be actualized in accordance with the divine purpose, the Eucharist cannot be conceived of as an isolated act, of value simply for the person who participates. It should be seen as an instance of the universal transformation of the created world, a transformation in which it is essential that human beings take part in. The sacramental

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<sup>28</sup> One may consult Zizioulas (2013), 163-171 for his concept.

consciousness should be transformed into an awareness of God's presence in all beings, an awareness that should change our *practises* radically. We can only participate fully in God's regenerative activity by being active ourselves. This means that our virtuous relationship with the natural surroundings become a primary and not a secondary concern. This is how we may become priests of creation: we have to cooperate with God in the transformation of the cosmos.

This activity should be directed by virtues. We are not entitled to inflict pain or fear in our relations with fellow humans. Nor are we to inflict suffering in our dealings with other natural entities. Of course, this is a very global claim and under the present conditions it has to be modified. We have to recognize that humanity has brought itself into a situation in which our economic systems and societies are dependent on a detrimental exploitation of nature. However, the tide has to be turned radically if we are to actualize the divine purpose. We cannot start from any other stance than where we are at the moment. But a lot of practices have to be changed, like our use of fossil energy, the way we produce food, develop industry, build houses, till the land. Much more *practical* ecotheological reflection needs to be developed, not in the sweeping terminology of esoteric claims but in details of how we may achieve a just, moderate, peaceful, and sustainable life and existence for humans, animals, plants, and stones. (The stones, probably, will be a matter for discussion.)

Why should we protect the Scolitantides orion?

Like any other natural species, the Chequered Blue has *intrinsic value* because it is created by God to be a partaker of God's regenerative activity. Whenever human beings "develop" terrain into space for building houses or other manmade structures, insects, birds, and other animals suffer. As a matter of fact, such entities are seldom reckoned with seriously in our calculations simply because they are not humans. From a Christian point of view, this is wrong. It is easy to counter my argument with saying that I put animals, insects, yes even stones on the same footing as humans. I do not. Human beings have a special responsibility since they are given the task of interconnecting all creatures and bringing them to God as a sacrifice. Then the transformation of the cosmos comes as a gift from the Creator.



One may object that this is a Utopian dream. I think we may learn a lesson from history, especially from the twentieth century, that *human* Utopian schemes are dangerous. Political movements that point the way to a perfect society, inflict enormous amounts of suffering on humans and on nature. On the other hand, if the *Kingdom of God* is a Utopian dream, so be it.

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