

The Beauty of Creation

Rev. D. McManaman

God is beauty itself, without limits, and the whole of reality is an expression of God's unlimited beauty. Everything that proceeds from God announces Him in some way. But no limited creature by itself can adequately express the whole of the divine beauty. Hence, creation is packed with variety and ordered according to a hierarchy; for such variety and order as a whole better expresses the unutterable mystery of God.

That is why hierarchy is not a bad thing. If everything were equalized, the whole of reality could not lift man's gaze and captivate him. Everything would announce what every other thing announces in a limited way, and the whole would not reveal anything about the unfathomable beauty of God.

Creation sings the praises of God without ceasing, and the artist is one who is in touch with this natural and recurring prayer. The true artist prays with creation, and his prayer is one of adoration, which does not require words; for creation prays without words. We could say that he allows creation to pray through him, for God's spirit that hovered over the water (Gn 1:2) prays in and through all that God has made: "Sun and moon! bless the Lord,... Stars of heaven! Bless the Lord,..." (Dn 3:62-62).

The genuine artist and the Christian have something in common. Both revere creation and in doing so adore God. Natural piety is a part of the virtue of religion, and this virtue begins with the recognition that all is gift. In a spirit of gratitude, both artist and believer are moved to a prayer of thanksgiving.

Like any virtue, however, there are the two extremes of excess and defect, which in this case amount to two distorted ways of seeing creation, both failing to see it from God's point of view.

Firstly, the defect: the Enlightenment separated spirit and matter, faith and reason, religion and science, with religion concerning itself with the things of faith and spirit alone, and science and technology with matter alone. This moved the West from an attitude of reverent stewardship of God's creation to one of exploitation.

The excess is the environmental movement, which loves the earth as a "goddess". The Gaia hypothesis (named after the Greek supreme goddess of earth) regards the earth as a single organism, one that suffers from a deadly cancer, namely human beings. A. Kent MacDougall writes: "The transformation of the natural contours of the land into the geometric patterns of farm fields, the straightening of meandering rivers into canal-like channels, and the logging of forests into checkerboard clearcuts all have their counterparts in the loss of normal skin markings in cancer victims... Highways, streets, parking lots have toughened Earth's surface, while cities have

roughened it. Slag heaps and garbage dumps can be compared to raised skin lesions. ...Signs of bleeding include the discharge of human sewage, factory effluents and acid mine drainage into adjacent waterways,..."

But the human person is as much a part of the earth as is a tree or a mountain, and mountains can do more damage to the earth than man. The initial eruption of Mount St. Helens released more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than man has since the time of the Industrial Revolution.

The only reason we see cancer as a bad thing is that the human person is a good thing, and so there is a contradiction at work at the very heart of the environmental movement: cancer is bad only on condition that human life is basically good, and yet the very idea of cancer as a bad thing is applied to the earth in a way that, in the end, overshadows human goodness. But if man is a disease on the surface of the earth, then cancer in man is a good thing, because it does away with man and effects the preservation of the "supreme being", the earth, in the long run.

But the earth does not exist for itself, but for man, and man exists for God. Every man is called to be a "priest" who offers every level of the hierarchy of being within himself to the praise and the glory of God the Father.

Douglas McManaman is a Permanent Deacon and teaches Philosophy of Religion at a Catholic High School. He resides in Aurora, ON.