

Message from Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury

Bose, 5 - 8 September 2012

XX International Ecumenical Conference

I pray that the deliberations of this conference may increase our eagerness to receive from God such purification of our sight and such strengthening

**XX International Ecumenical Conference
on Orthodox spirituality**

MAN-CUSTODIAN OF CREATION

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In the narrative of Genesis, God “saw that it was good” at the end of several different stages of the creative history; but when the process is complete with the creation of humankind, “God saw that it was *very good*” (Gen 1,31). Humanity is not separate from the rest of creation; but neither is humanity simply another phase in the story. Humanity’s presence adds some decisive quality, rather than just repeating the “goodness” of other elements in the universe.

From the early days of Christian faith, interpreters have noted this feature of the creation story; and also from very early days, they have understood the intensified goodness of a creation that includes humanity in relation to the fact that there is now in the world a created being capable of reflecting God in mind and heart and act. Still more, this is a created being capable of bearing the Incarnate reality of God the Son in the fullness of time. As St Gregory Palamas says, humanity is endowed with beauty and dignity in anticipation of the Incarnation. And this makes it clear that the special position of humanity is not a privilege of power or exploitation. Humanity is created to bear the reality of the Eternal Word in flesh; and the Eternal Word is the one in whom every created being finds its abiding form and meaning, its own particular *logos*, in the language of St Maximus. If humanity is in God’s image, and if that image is fully realised in the coming of the Word in flesh, humanity’s calling is to love and nourish the true meaning and form of every aspect of the creation, not to try and subordinate it to some passing version of what seems to be in the interest of humanity in isolation.

Hence the importance of the subject that this conference addresses for our ethics and our prayer. We must seek constantly to nurture a vision of other humans and of the world around us that is open to their true, Christ-related nature, and to act towards them with the love and reverence that imposes on us. The ascetical struggle to be free of passion is a struggle to be free of all that distorts this vision and so to be free for loving service. And the Church in its liturgy celebrates and realises this restored vision.

I pray that the deliberations of this conference may increase our eagerness to receive from God such purification of our sight and such strengthening of our service in a world of constantly spiralling exploitation and acquisitiveness, so that the true face of humanity and the true face of creation itself may be revealed in their full splendour by the Spirit’s grace.

+ Rowan Cantuar,
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