Liturgy Canada is a society of women and men committed to the ongoing renewal of the Church in worship and mission. Our ministry is to provide resources on our liturgical life which focus the debate, inform our practice and evaluate our experience.

As Liturgy Canada moves to an electronic – that is, paperless – production model, it is appropriate that we dedicate an issue to the way our liturgical sensibilities and environmental awareness are related. In this precis, you will find John Hill’s extended article, Ecological Implications of the Liturgical Calendar as well as his essays, Dualism and the Destruction of Creation and The Sacramental Nature of Liturgical Environment and Art. In bringing these thought provoking pieces to Liturgy Canada, John asks us to seriously consider how the necessary conjunction of liturgy and our environment are natural reflections of our sacramental life in the world.

Both historically and liturgically, Christianity has noted the cycles of planting and harvest, of months and seasons. We are attuned from our Jewish ancestry to the association of Easter with the equinox, and Christmas with the solstice. The Magi who rely upon celestial signs point to the stars of creation as a sign of divine action and intent. Jesus, who teaches in fields and orchards, uses the very crops surrounding him to describe the life of the Kingdom. In taking these signs and symbols for granted, we either avoid or ignore the most tangible connection between ourselves and the divine through the created order.

In the last 30 years, we have begun to reconnect with this inherent relationship. The Prayer for the Gifts of the Spirit in the Baptismal Liturgy invites us to know the gift of joy and wonder in all God’s works; the Fifth Mark of Mission (Anglican Consultative Council, 1984-90) commends us “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.” The fourth Eucharist prayer (Book of Alternative Services, p. 201) describes the explicit place of the earth and humanity within the cosmic order. The Church calendar notes the season of planting (Rogation) and Harvest. And to deny any of these is to deny the sacramental nature of life itself in relationship with God.

This issue of Liturgy Canada invites us into dialogue about the nature of our liturgical practices in relationship to the environment and the created order, and will serve to introduce the new format of our newsletter. This is new ground for us, and as we evolve into the world of e-publishing, our plans are to move from simply publishing an e-format newsletter to a fully interactive web format, with hyperlinked access to other sources, resources and opinions, with improved opportunities for interactive discussion and responses.
There is increasing concern that the world, as the environment of life, is being destroyed by pollution, exploitation, and waste. More and more people recognize that the human race is in danger of corrupting the very envelope in which life subsists, and that we do not know what to do about it.

For Christians in particular, misuse of the environment is a spiritual problem. Christians believe that it is God’s purpose that the whole created order should be transparent to the divine Spirit, should be an outward and visible sign of God’s being, generosity, and love. Misuse of creation frustrates that purpose and creates a problem which is theological, sacramental, and devotional.

The creation stories of Genesis provide the basis of a theology of the environment. They tell us that creation is not an enchanted forest dominated by the random and arbitrary caprice of elemental spirits, but is the gift of God. They tell us that the material order is not the product of God’s shadow or opposite, but is good because God gave it. They tell us that people are not alien spirits destined eventually to escape their material bonds, but are intended to be at home here, living in responsible harmony with the world of which they are part. The rebellion of human pride may be an impediment to complete harmony, but it is not an excuse for destructive behaviour and the bible in its long-range view looks forward to a remedy and not to despair.

Creation and new creation form a central strand of the salvation story of the bible. The God who creates, creates again. The eternal Word through whom all things were made is the first-born of the new creation. One of the final images of the bible describes not people going up to heaven but heaven coming down to earth (Rev 21.1-22.5), to fulfil and complete this world of water, trees, mountains, nations, and food. God’s new creation embraces the whole natural order and not merely souls; degradation of the natural order is, consequently, blasphemy.

We face the dilemma that we (the human race) are destroying our own environment and do not know how to stop. Any dilemma is an opportunity for prayer, but especially this dilemma with its awful ultimacy. When we pray in a time of dilemma we do not ask God to impose a solution from outside; we ask for help in our helplessness to find a solution within. “Prayer for ourselves and our environment should be a constant feature of our liturgy, not merely the subject of special occasions. The future of our environment is not one cause among many and should not be relegated to a special Sunday once a year.”
The Season of Advent

We may observe how, in the interests of commerce and in obedience to the demands of ‘the economy’, our society has shifted the season of Christmas. In the liturgical calendar, the season begins on Christmas Day and ends the day before The Epiphany; in the secular calendar, it begins in the mid-autumn and ends on Christmas Day. Thus redefined, ‘Christmas’ serves to promote shopping rather than the celebration of God’s supreme gift. But by resisting this cultural distortion and keeping Advent, we prepare ourselves to welcome the Messiah who will satisfy our deepest desires — for ourselves and for our world. As we focus on the promise of God’s coming reign of justice and peace, ‘the kingdom of God’, we claim our freedom from the mounting pressure of consumerism which exploits the Nativity of our Lord to sell us things we do not need.

In the weeks before Christmas, the Sunday Gospels urge us to be prepared for the coming ‘day of the Lord’; they warn us about religious conceits and delusions; they predict the coming deluge of chaos and violence that will precede the dawning of a new age; they summon us to a change of heart and direction; they assure us that the wise judge is coming and that the ancient prophecies will be fulfilled. Climate scientists have now given us a picture of immanent global developments to match the Bible’s dire scenarios.

Advent, therefore, is a season of turning our lives around, waiting patiently, and renewing hope. Burying ourselves in the glitz and burdens of consumerism is a terrible distraction from the urgency of this moment in history and the worst possible way to prepare for Christmas. Keeping Advent can be a liberation from these delusions.

Advent also invites us into a relationship with those whose lives are a sign of the coming Kingdom – Jesus’ mother and John the Baptist — and asks us to consider those personalities in our own day and age who point to the Kingdom before us, or call us to repentance of past deeds.

We also need to be aware of a common misuse of the so-called ‘little apocalypse’ which is part of the lectionary in all three years of the Sundays before Christmas (Matthew 24 / Mark 13 / Luke 21). A kind of secular apocalyptic sensibility pervades much contemporary film, literature, and music, for we are indeed bringing upon ourselves the ‘woes’ that Jesus foresaw. Some Christians actually think that concern for the future of our planet is irrelevant (because it has no future), that we are living in the End Time when Jesus will return, the righteous will enter heaven, and sinners will be condemned to eternal hellfire. Some even believe that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed — perhaps even hastened — as a sign of the coming Apocalypse. But what Jesus actually says is that we should see these so-called apocalyptic events as the birth pangs of the new age. He urges us to be ready, not for the departure of the chosen, but for his coming in glory.
The Season of Christmas

God, who created our humanity, has taken on our humanity to redeem it. We celebrate the birth in time and space and flesh and blood of the Word through whom all things were created, acknowledging that through this incarnation God has reclaimed the whole material world as the locus of the divine passion and purpose. The incarnation is God’s ‘natal bond’ with this world. To believe in the incarnation of God in Jesus is to be committed to the material for the sake of its salvation, its healing and its consummation.

But there is more. As Henry Nouwen puts it, “When God took on flesh in Jesus Christ, the uncreated and the created, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human became united. This unity meant that all that is mortal now points to the immortal, all that is finite now points to the infinite. In and through Jesus all creation has become like a splendid veil, through which the face of God is revealed to us. This is called the sacramental quality of the created order. All that is is sacred because all that is speaks of God’s redeeming love. Seas and winds, mountains and trees, sun, moon, and stars, and all the animals and people have become sacred windows offering us glimpses of God.” (See also John’s article, The Present Future Dualism of Historic Christianity below.)

The Epiphany

For a Jewish-Christian text, the story of the Coming of the Magi is remarkably kind to those foreign astrologers from the east. We too must learn a new respect for the perceptions and values of indigenous peoples, and open to what they can teach us about reading the signs around us and listening to dreams.

The Baptism of the Lord

The great scandal of Jesus’ baptism (see Matthew 3.13-15) was the apparent implication that Jesus felt the need to repent of something and so became a disciple of John the Baptist. The even bigger scandal, of course, was his reputation as one who ate and drank with outcasts and sinners. We celebrate his baptism rejoicing that he who knew no sin refused to separate himself from sinners and so was able to repent on our behalf for the sins of the world.

The major motif of this story, however, is his anointing with Holy Spirit. We look back to this moment as the Father’s anointing of the long-awaited Messiah (which means ‘anointed one’). It is his destiny to be the ‘king’ of God’s coming ‘kingdom’ — whose throne will be across, and whose crown will be thorns. Christians are baptized and anointed to share his messianic calling; for this reason, we who have known sin now refuse to

The Baptism of the Lord is celebrated in the Eastern Churches with a blessing of water, acknowledging that when Jesus stepped into the Jordan he sanctified all water to be a sign of the world’s redemption (notwithstanding the present exploitation of that river which has reduced it to a filthy trickle). As the water in the font is blessed, the priest plunges a cross into the water, connecting the stories of Jordan and Golgotha; then, as the liturgy ends, all drink of this water, and take some of it home to use for healing purposes.

In our celebration of this day, a small cross may be solemnly immersed in the water of the font during the Thanksgiving Over the Water; then, at the end of the prayer, a pitcher may be filled from the water in the font and placed beside it. Before welcoming the newly
separate ourselves from sinners and repent not only for our own sins, but also for the sin of the world. In our weekly prayers of intercession we acknowledge our own complicity in the devastation of the biosphere, praying that we may be the ‘first fruits’ of the new creation, learning to treasure what we have so long squandered.

After Epiphany

As we follow Jesus in the launch of his mission — announcing the nearness of God’s reign, calling disciples, healing the sick, restoring the demonized to community, feeding the hungry — we hear how his teaching draws on imagery from the natural world and the social order: imagery of soil, water, planting and growth, illustrations from communal and economic life. The coming kingdom that he asks us to pray for must take root in this world, in our common life here and now, for this is the world God means to heal and redeem through Christ. Disciples are called to live as if the kingdom of God has already begun; they are to invest their energies and their wealth not in the affairs of this present passing age that is under the authority of the ‘principalities and powers’ but in the affairs of the age to come. This must include caring for the health of the creation so that future generations, both human and non-human, may flourish, rather than treating the earth ‘like a business in liquidation’.

We need to consider when and how we can celebrate the liturgy out-of-doors. The liturgy is a response to God’s summons of all humanity, not a private affair; the liturgy is a prayer offered on behalf of all creation, not a prayer to be offered in hermetic isolation from it. Culminating in the Feast of the Transfiguration (see also below, August 6 Hiroshima Day), we reflect on the mountain-top experience of Peter, James and John – Jesus’ closest companions – as the glory of the divine and mortal natures of the Christ are fully revealed as the pinnacle, both literally and metaphorically, of their experience of God.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Christian unity is important for many reasons, not the least of which is that the Church must become once again a Sign of the Kingdom. But the reign of God that Jesus announced was not somewhere else, after we leave this world; instead, “the kingdom of the world [will become] the kingdom of our God and of his Messiah.” That is why we take the created order seriously. In this we must be united if we are to be an effective sign.

Whatever the customs for local ecumenical activity, ensure that people are able to come together around creation care.
The Season of Lent

The purpose of fasting as a lenten discipline is to recognize and renounce the powers and dominions that are opposed to the dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ. For most of us, this means breaking addictions — whether to substances, or fashions, or life-styles, and learning non-violent ways of resisting the idolatrous powers of this present world.

Dependency on fossil fuels is a major addiction of our culture with destructive consequences, but it is a dependency none of us can break on our own — a social rather than an individual addiction.

Lent can be a time of new learning, consciousness-raising, repentance, and renewed hope as we collaborate in the development of a sustainable culture and economy. The Babylonian Talmud says, “All those who are in a position to stop the members of their household from sinning and do not do so are held accountable for the sins of their household; those who are in a position to reprove their fellow citizens and do not do so are held accountable for the sins of their city; and those who are in position to reprove all humanity and do not do so are held accountable for the sins of the whole world.”

In Lent we hear the gospel proclaimed in the context of a rising storm of opposition to Jesus and his announcement of the coming reign of God. We must seek to recognize ourselves in these stories and so to understand the roots of our own resistance to the gospel. Resistance to changing our patterns of consumption is the primary reason that we are still on the fast-track to ecological disaster. In these gospel episodes, therefore, we may begin to glimpse the liberation Jesus offers to us and our culture.

Holy Week

The glorified Jesus is still marked by the wounds of the cross which shows us his compassionate involvement with humanity in its suffering and with the whole groaning reality of creation. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revelation of the children of God... in hope that [it] will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now” (Romans 8: 19 - 22). Jesus is the mother who gives birth through his suffering on the cross to a new world, liberated from the dominion of death.

The Season of Easter

The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of the transformation of the whole creation. This is the season of new creation, when a different kind of life rises up from the realm of death. The Church is the ‘first-fruits’ of this ‘new harvest’, a sign to the world of what God is bringing about. Our incorporation into his crucified and risen body is the revelation of the world’s original and eschatological significance.

This is a time to exhibit boldly both the vision and the practical measures that will lead to a sustainable economy and culture. The agricultural significance of Pesach (Passover) and the earthy symbols associated with Easter (lilies, butterflies, eggs, etc.) provide further opportunity to explore the relationship between our faith life and the world renewed in the paschal mystery.

continued on page 7


**Solemn Prayer for the Fertility of the Earth (Rogation Days)**

In earlier times the three days before the festival of The Ascension were days of processional prayer for the blessing of farmland and crops. Today, rogation practices may take place whenever appropriate and can be a suitable way of observing Earth Day (April 22). Solemn processions around fields or gardens are a way of acknowledging our dependence on the fruits of the earth and celebrating God’s care for all creation. It is also an act of public witness in a time when many people are oblivious to the seriousness of the threat to the health of the planet, including the loss of essential farmlands.

**The Ascension of the Lord**

Jesus’ resurrection does not mean he is no longer incarnate but rather that there is now a new form of incarnation. It is our humanity that is exalted in the ascension of the Lord. We believe in the resurrection of the body, and thus we venerate the body, together with the entire biosphere of which our bodies are a part, as we await their transformation into new heavens and new earth.

**Pentecost**

The Spirit that empowered Jesus is now poured out on all his followers so that we can bear witness, as he did, to God’s purposes for the world. We are now his body, his presence, contending for God’s dream for our world, against all the systems and structures that resist God’s dream, including those which despoil the earth and threaten the future of the ecosystem. Advocacy to restore creation is part of our calling. Jesus says, “Do not worry about what you are to say; but say whatever is given to you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13.11).

**After Pentecost**

During this stretch of the year, commonly called ‘ordinary time’, each Lord’s Day is a celebration of the resurrection of Christ and of his risen presence in the world in us through the power of his Spirit. The reflections above on Easter and Pentecost therefore apply to each Sunday’s liturgy. In Canada, June 21 is observed as National Aboriginal Day, when our relationship with the First Nations is a day of both celebration and repentance. It provides us an opportunity to gather with those whose life and piety is directly related to the natural order as one of companionship rather than exploitation.

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Plan a rogation service with procession in your community, visiting selected gardens or walking around farm fields. Resources for this may be found in Occasional Celebrations, Prayer for the Environment, pages F68 - F73. Water saved from the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord (see above) may be sprinkled on fields and gardens.

The Revised Common Lectionary uses Psalm 104 on the Feast of Pentecost in all three years. A refrain, such as “Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth” draws us into a powerful reflection of the relationship between God and creation.

Now is the time to plan public demonstrations of concern about climate change and to train for and undertake concerted advocacy on behalf of ending our reliance on fossil fuels and developing renewable energy sources, writing letters to government and industrial leaders.

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continued on page 8
August 6 - Hiroshima Day (formerly The Transfiguration of the Lord)

This festival, which celebrates the hidden glory of God's obedient Servant, falls on the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. On this very day the atomic bomb, an evil form of 'glory', unmasked the profane arrogance of human ingenuity devoted to the extermination of life on earth. The juxtaposition of these two versions of glory provides us a theological foundation for resisting the great evil of trying to secure our future with atomic weapons. But we need to ask ourselves, How did we become so desensitized to God's investment in this beautiful world that we allowed this notion of security through 'mutually assured destruction' to develop? And why are we so reluctant to respond to the contemporary warnings of catastrophic global warming?

Holy Cross Day

The fourth century 'discovery' of a remnant of the true cross at the site of Golgotha and its incorporation into the new Church of the Resurrection in that place of death has provided us an occasion to celebrate the mystery of redemption. When the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as misused in defiance of God's will, all creation came to grief and suffering. Yet the desecration of another tree by using it as an instrument of torture and destruction is the event we now celebrate as the beginning of the world's redemption. The fruit of this tree is not death but life; the sacrilege carried out with this tree will lead not to our expulsion from paradise but to our return. Therefore, we whose hopes are pinned on this tree cannot abandon hope for the whole creation. The cross has revealed God's willingness to suffer our abuse of his gifts in order to rescue us and them together. This defiled wood radiates the glory of God. We now share in Christ's sufferings as we witness the exploitation of God's gifts, for this pain is our awakening to God's determination to redeem and heal the whole creation.

Harvest Thanksgiving

Like Rogation Days (see above), Harvest Thanksgiving is a time to acknowledge our dependence on the fruits of the earth and celebrate God's care for all creation. But whereas Rogation Days centre on the hopes we invest in our planting, this celebration centres on the gathering of God's bounty. Some of the hymns for this occasion give an eschatological dimension to this observance, echoing Jesus' use of harvesting as a metaphor of the day when all the world will gather in joy at the table of God's kingdom. Harvest Thanksgiving is typically marked with displays of garden produce, providing an opportunity to explore the rich symbolism of banquet, eucharist, homecoming, reward for our labours, and the fulfilment of all God's purposes in creation.

Eric Routley's hymn, The Tree of Life (There in God's Garden stands the tree of wisdom...) set to Lee Scott's very singable tune, is a magnificent reflection on the nature of God's gift and our desecration of all that is important to God, with the opportunity for repentance and return.

If there is a local commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, plan to participate in it as a parish witness to the way of Jesus.

There is a profound separation of urban and rural life, and from the production and consumption of food. Consider a twinning project between a town or city congregation with a congregation in an agricultural production centre. Incorporate prayers for each others' needs through the year, and celebrate the relationship at Thanksgiving.
All Saints to The Reign of Christ
The lectionary treats these Sundays as being in a continuum with Advent. Not apocalypse, but eschatology must be our focus during these days. Apocalypse is the ‘unveiling’ of a future we bring upon ourselves through our resistance to learning the ways of God; eschatology is the promise of a future God will bestow on all who turn to him in trust and faithfulness: the reign of Christ. Part of this turning to God will be the cultivation of a rich imagination, to see the world as God means it to be. See also the comments above on the season of Advent.

Now is the time to begin planning how the parish will keep a holy Advent; see the suggestions above.
Hymns Celebrating God’s Creation

from Common Praise and Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Hymns marked with an asterisk acknowledge, to some degree, our contemporary crisis.

All Beautiful the March of Days CP #427
All Creatures of Our God and King CP #355
All Creatures, Worship God Most High ELW #835
All Things Bright and Beautiful CP #415, 416
Before the Earth Had Yet Begun CP #409
Come Join the Dance of Trinity ELW #412
Fairest Lord Jesus CP #619
Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation CP #574 *
For the Beauty of the Earth CP #429
For the Fruit of All Creation CP #259
God of the Sparrow CP #414
God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens ELW #771
God Whose Farm is All Creation CP #261
Golden Breaks the Dawn ELW #852
Have You Thanked the Lord? ELW #829
How Marvelous God’s Greatness ELW #830
I Bind Unto Myself Today CP #436
Joyful. Joyful We Adore Thee CP #425
Let All Creation Bless the Lord CP #419
Let All Things Now Living CP #403
Let Us with a Gladsome Mind CP #398
Light Dawns on a Weary World ELW #726 *
Light Shone in Darkness ELW #307
Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works CP #407
Morning has Broken CP #3
Most High, Omnipotent, Good Lord CP #421
New Songs of Celebration Render CP #316
O God, Beyond All Face and Form CP #412
O God, Creation’s Secret Force CP #4
O Healing River CP #578 *
O Lord of Every Shining Constellation CP #411
O Sing to God Above ELW #555
O Worship the King CP # 380
Once to Every Man and Nation CP #587 *
Praise the Lord, Sing Halleluiah CP #317
Sing Praise to God CP #424 *
Soli Deo Gloria ELW #878
The Duteous Day Now Closes CP #19
The Spacious Firmament on High CP #426
This Is My Father’s World ELW #824 *
The Stars Declare His Glory CP #413
Touch the Earth Lightly ELW #739 *
Ye Boundless Realms of Joy CP #356
You Call Us, Lord to Be CP #450
When Long Before Time CP #307 *
When Pain of the World Surrounds Us ELW 704 *
Wind upon the Waters CP #408
The earth is succumbing to a destructive climate crisis, largely because of our irresponsible and anthropocentric relationship to the earth. As an official of the World Bank has observed, we treat the earth “like a business in liquidation.” The global economy has become a Ponzi scheme. Although we have the technology and resources for a sustainable relationship to the earth, we lack the will to develop it. This is, above all, a spiritual crisis, and we as God’s people are called to model a different relationship to the earth as God’s creation. This is not merely a matter of avoiding destructive behaviour; our priority must be to cherish the world God loves.

Most of our places of worship were built before we had begun to recognize the climate crisis, and the combination of outdated construction and inadequate upkeep has left most of us worshipping in monuments to environmental abuse. But the tools for making them more sustainable and energy efficient and reducing our carbon footprint are now available, and faithfulness to the gospel of God’s purposes for the world will include addressing this issue. We cannot ignore the symbolic character of our liturgical life; symbolism is our essential language, and the buildings where we worship are the Church’s most visible public symbol. With proper care, the place we worship will be a sacrament of the divine hospitality, reflecting the ordered economy of the planet as a whole.

Sacraments reveal the redeeming work of God in and through the created elements of this world: water, oil, bread, wine, hands, feet, breath, wood, stone, fabric, glass, etc. Our use of materials in worship must honour God’s loving purpose for those materials, enabling us to enjoy them for what they are and for what they mean, and to rejoice in their fragile beauty. Plastic flowers taking the place of real ones, propane ‘candles’ taking the place of wax ones, offering to God mass-produced art — such things betray the dignity of the created world.

Similarly, attempts to evoke the ‘sacred’ through the mere repetition of ecclesiastical clichés — pointed arches, pews, archaic styles and fencing off ‘sacred’ spaces — all such fashions fall short of the revealed meaning of the sacred. When we designate some spaces or things as sacred in a way that implicitly relegates other spaces or things to the category of the profane, we deny God’s love and concern for the whole created order. Things become sacred when we put them to sacred use; by doing so, we implicitly claim all things as potentially holy, inasmuch as they all can be used in ways that serve the divine purposes. We consecrate bread as a sign that all bread will someday nourish the sacred fellowship of our shared humanity in the crucified and risen Christ. There is no such commodity as ‘sacramental bread’, or ‘sacramental wine’, except as common bread and wine are consecrated through thanksgiving and sharing in remembrance of him and in hope for the redemption of all things. What is consecrated enables us to see the holy clearly so that we can recognize the holy in all things. Thus, it is not the clichéd styles of church art and architecture that reveal the sacred, but the reverent use of things of this world in loving service of God, regardless of the style, that reveals the sacred.

There is a reason that particular arts flourish in the liturgy: bread-baking, wine-making, congregational and choral music, poetry and drama and architecture, stained glass, woodworking and stone-carving, weaving and flower-arranging.
The material crafts, the ordering of sound, space, light and time, the savouring of the whole human experience of the world, all these are offerings from within the created order to their Maker. Local, handmade art and craft which arises out of appreciation of the holiness of created things will always be appropriate.

We also strive to ensure that in our liturgical gathering, in our architecture, and in our congregational use of earth’s resources, we model a sustainable co-existence within God’s creation.

When we gather out-of-doors to celebrate the liturgy, we can do so in ways that acknowledge and honour the glories of that environment; we need not impose upon the natural order furnishings and physical arrangements that evoke the ‘churchiness’ of conventional church architecture. Patterns of ritual that are customary amongst first nations peoples have much to teach us about this.

In short, our worship must be a transparent witness to the worth that this world has for the God who created it.

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**Dualism and the Destruction of Creation**

The normal function of hope for the future is the reshaping of our approach to life in the present. This is the reality so movingly explored in Victor Frankl’s book, ‘Man’s Search for Meaning,’ documenting the different survival prospects of Jews interned in the Nazi death camps, depending upon whether they believed they still had family alive who had escaped capture and were waiting for them.

Jesus took this dynamic of hope deeper, teaching his followers not only to pray for the coming of the kingdom but to live the life of the kingdom now, as if it had already come: the life of truth, compassion, and forgiveness (Matthew 5-7).

Thus ‘salvation’ is both a future hope (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18; Philippians 3. 20; 1 Corinthians 15.20-26), and a present experience (Colossians 1.13; Hebrews 6.5).

**For Christians, this already-but-not-yet experience of salvation is provided and sustained by sacramental practice.** In baptism, we die with Christ in hope of sharing his resurrection (Romans 6.3), and we are empowered by his Spirit which is the first instalment of salvation (2 Corinthians 1.22; Romans 5.5; Ephesians 1. 13-14). In the eucharist, we not only proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11.26), but by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, we have eternal life (already), and the Lord will raise up on the last day (as well) (John 6.54).

The gospel meaning of heaven is God’s realm (where God’s will is done). This world is merely a rebellious province within God’s realm, and we are taught to pray for the ‘coming’ of God’s kingdom (realm) “on earth as in heaven.” That kingdom comes as we seize it by faith (Matthew 8.10-13; 9. 2, 22, 29; 15.28; 17. 20, etc.); its coming is experienced as God’s empowering grace in a life of resistance to the rebellion of the world. The final triumph of God’s will for the world will be a triumph of revelation of God’s grace (Revelation 1. 7). This is depicted in metaphors suggesting a fulfilment of our present fleeting joys: entering God’s rest (Hebrews 4. 1-11), sitting down at the great wedding banquet (Matthew 22.1; Revelation 19.9), etc. Individuals who

continued on page 13
die in Christ are at rest, hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3), awaiting the day of resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.50-53).

However, the stresses of ‘living the future’ within a hostile and rebellious world began to distort Christian consciousness, especially as the toll of martyrs for the faith mounted. This horror provoked a greater emphasis on the future salvation (into which martyrs were surely welcomed, and awarded ‘the martyr’s crown’ immediately), since the present was dominated by threats and uncertainties. Heaven, originally looked to as the completion and fullness of the new life already begun, came to be seen more as a reward for faithful witness in suffering.

Thus, as the ‘already’ dimension of the triumph of God’s grace began to fade, and the ‘not-yet’ dimension began to dominate the notion of salvation, the need for more substantial depictions of heaven displaced the images of the triumph of “the kingdom of our God and of his Christ” (Revelation 11.15) with trivialized depictions of self-centred wish-fulfilment. The hope of participating in the final triumph of God’s grace in Christ on the day of resurrection gave way to the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul, and ‘salvation’ became individualized.

After the imperialization of the church into a clerical institution preoccupied with shaping and sustaining the social order, heaven became more and more the carrot-at-the-end-of-the-stick by which obedience to the church’s teaching was maintained. Eventually, when the whole population (except for Jews, and later Muslims) were considered Christians, the experience of the Christian life no longer constituted an alternative to the life of ‘this passing age,’ and the entire meaning of salvation was projected into the future, in another world. By the middle ages, baptism was no longer understood as entering the life of the age to come, but as a washing away of original sin, and communion was, at most, a twice-a-year experience for most of the baptized. Sacramental practice no longer offered an experience of tasting heaven now. This is the triumph of present/future dualism: the Christian’s ultimate goal is to escape this ‘vale of tears’ and get to heaven.

Nevertheless, human life continued to be consciously symbiotic with the natural order; yet the church’s teaching emphasized this present life as a time of testing and preparation for the life to come.

However, the enlightenment, through its celebration of human reason as our capacity to comprehend and master the natural order, introduced the temptation to break the bonds of this symbiosis. Out of this new hubris emerged the industrial age with its exploitation of the earth as merely a quarry of ‘resources.’ This constituted a secularized version of the relationship between future hope and present faith: the future is now something for us to take by force, rather than something to receive by faith from the Father who delights to give us the kingdom (Luke 12: 32). It is the opposite of seizing the future by faith. This is the ultimate irony, for it leads not to the redemption of the creation but to its destruction. We rob our children of their future to satisfy our lusts of the present moment. For Christians who continue to inhabit present/future dualism, this is of no great consequence, since getting to heaven is what matters most, not the salvation of the world that God so loved he gave his only Son (John 3.16).

Dualism is an antithesis between two irreconcilable realities. The present vs. future dualism fails to recognize the dynamic interconnection between them. The dualism of heaven vs. earth sees them as being two separate places. The dualism of body vs. soul sees the body as a problem from which we will be delivered by death, and the soul as our true being, eternal by nature. The dualistic idea of salvation is ‘going to heaven when you die,’ an idea which invites those who hope in this kind of salvation to treat this world with contempt. The dualism of humanity vs. the natural world leads to humans treating the rest of creation as a resource to be exploited and as a garbage dump. All these various forms of dualism support one another and feed off one another, for they are all forms of our hubris and the entitlement we assume. Dualism such as this is not faith, but contempt for the ways of God.