**John Chryssavgis, ed.,** ***Cosmic Grace and Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I***, Michigan, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, pages xii + 351, ISBN: 0-8028-2169-3.

*Cosmic Grace and Humble Prayer* analyses the ecological vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I. The work is edited and translated from the original Greek by John Chryssavgis with a foreword by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon. There is a beautiful unity between the foreword, acknowledgements, long introduction and the text of the book. Metropolitan John of Pergamon points out that the present day ecological crisis is rooted in theology, and it is above all a spiritual problem. The church has to revise her pastoral teachings, and work as to transform the mentality and attitude of modern people, making them realize that the protection of the natural environment is a fundamental religious obligation demanded from humankind by God himself. Human being is the priest of creation who takes the world in his hands as a ‘gift’ and refers it back to God in thankfulness by sharing it with others in love which itself is a eucharistic action and a manifestation of an ascetic mentality enabling him to overcome his selfishness.

In the acknowledgements gratitude for the permission to include the painting “Christopsaro-Christfish” by Gabriel Pentzikis on the cover is expressed. This picture depicts a fish in the baptismal font, surrounded by people – clergy and monastic – in mystical prayer and solemn procession. As Pentzikis’ art is highly transfigurative revealing a transformed world pointing to the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1), it is very much symbolic and fitting to be the cover design of the present volume.

In the long introduction the editor draws a biographical sketch of the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I giving a history of his initiatives and action, especially in the field of environment and ecology.

The “Orthodox theology and the environment” given in the introduction is very helpful to understand the text of the book with its theological content, style and expression. The editor says that he has revised the translations from the original Greek and edited the texts significantly, though not substantially to provide greater uniformity and smoother accessibility to a general readership. Titles have been created in order to replace abstract headings.

The editor very correctly says in the introduction that before we can effectively deal with problems of our environment, we must change our world-image, which, in turn, means that we must change our self-image. Otherwise, we are simply dealing with symptoms, not with their causes. The root of the problem is religious.

The erudite introduction is a fitting prelude to the text unfolding the unity of thought, worship and praxis in the orthodox world. There is also an implicit appeal to all “people of good will” to work for restoring the connections between things, communion between religions and peoples, reconciliation between God and cosmos. “God reconciled to himself all things in heaven and on earth in Christ by the blood on the cross” (Col 1:20).

The book is divided into three parts and Part I is titled “Call to Prayer: Encyclical Letters.” Out of the 12 encyclical letters the first two are signed by patriarch Demetrios I, the former one written on September 1, 1989 declaring September 1st of every year, which is also the first day of the ecclesiastical year of the Orthodox church as the day of prayer for the protection of the environment. This letter gives theological reasons for its concern on environmental protection and the rationale behind the declaration of September 1 as the day of environmental protection. The second letter reminds that we have to treat the environment as its responsible stewards and not as its users.

Then we have ten messages from the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I which are written for September 1 starting from 1992 to 2002 manifesting his deep and genuine ecological concerns and anxieties and the solutions. The prayers intended for remedying this modern catastrophe also highlight the biblico-theological as well as Christian anthropological foundations behind his viewpoints.

Part II, as its very title points out, contains addresses and statements of the Patriarch numbering eleven of them plus one which is a common message of the primates.

Part III, “Interviews and Comments,” forms the last section which consists of excerpts from the Patriarch’s interviews to different groups of people underlining his commitment and involvement in environmental issues which is not a matter of public relations but of theological convictions. The common declaration on Environmental Ethics by Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in this section is a clear testimony to the agony of the two spiritual leaders of human problems such as violence, starvation and ecological disasters.

All the three parts, thus, bring together the encyclical letters, addresses and statements, interviews and comments of the Green Patriarch, Bartholomew I, consistently emphasizing his ecological and environmental concerns even when he refers to other issues such as justice, poverty and globalisation and he is making his points clear in relation to the respective issues. His deep ecological vision can be summarized as follows: we Christians must act today as nature’s voice in raising its plea for salvation before the throne of God. The Orthodox Church teaches us that it is the destiny of humankind to restore the proper relationship between God and the world, just as it was in the Garden of Eden. It has become painfully apparent that humanity, both individually and collectively, no longer perceives the natural order as a sign and a sacrament of God, but rather as an object of exploitation. There is need for repentance that must be accompanied by three soundly focussed principles, which manifest the ethos of the Orthodox Church:

1. The eucharistic ethos which means using the earth’s natural resources with thankfulness, offering them back to God, together with ourselves.
2. The ascetic ethos of Orthodoxy involves fasting and other spiritual works.
3. Liturgical ethos emphasizes community concern and sharing.

We are dutifully reminded by the Church that God himself placed in us “the message of reconciliation” (II Cor 5:19), that he entrusted to Christians the proclamation of the Gospel, the message of reconciliation, loving communion of God with humankind and the natural world.

Prayer of the Orthodox Church with its head, the patriarch is that violence must not be inflicted on nature as well as we must also be saved from natural calamities.

The photos and the icons included in the book give a magnificent visual appeal to the overall panoramic appearance of the book. The select sources given on the closing pages are useful for those interested in further research and study on the topic of ecology and environment. The index certainly makes easier and smoother reference to this book.

Repetitions and repetitiveness in this work are justified from the point of pedagogical purpose which could cover up the monotony.

The editor has successfully brought out the ecological vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I, which is very much relevant in our times.

## **Isaac Arickappillil**