Ann Georgi – Morning Prayer – January 5, 2007

I was planning to talk to the undergraduates this morning about keeping their academic and career options open, about taking chances and exploring academic routes that are outside of the ordinary, but I find that I have a more pressing concern and in writing this message, I realized that it presents a similar challenge to all of us.

There is a lot of discussion these days about morality and which political theory, philosophy or religion holds the correct vision for the world. But most of them have failed to address what may prove to be the most universal crisis in human history – the impact of our civilization on the ecosystem. We face environmental catastrophe yet our political, moral and philosophical leaders have failed to lead. Ecologists and climatologists have been warning us for years about the impact that human endeavor has had on the earth and our global climate. But, we have not responded to their pleas for change. The apathy of our leadership has created an atmosphere of complacency that is nearly insurmountable. Like ostriches, we have stuck our heads in the sand to avoid facing the peril that threatens our survival.

Yes, many of us have taken steps to curb our energy consumption and we dutifully recycle our cans and bottles and feel good about driving our hybrid cars, but the situation (or "crisis") now calls for a more concerted international effort and more sacrifice from all of us. Perhaps it matters who is responsible for creating the problem, but there is too little time left to respond to this threat to quibble and there is plenty of blame to go around. Whether it is massive deforestation in the Amazon, Indonesia or Tibet, coal burning factories in China and elsewhere or technologically advanced societies that continue to pour pollutants into water supplies or the atmosphere, the cumulative effect has been environmental stress that is no longer sustainable. We Americans are justifiably proud of our stunning technological achievements sometimes accomplished during times of national peril, achievements such as the development of the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project during World War II. We have watched at home as men have walked on the moon (remember when the news channel ran a ticker across the bottom of the screen that said "Live from the moon?") Should we not be able to mount an international response on this scale to begin to solve this most pressing problem? Success depends on a united effort that transcends cultural, political and theological boundaries. This is the challenge I put to you: how can we begin to put aside our fundamental differences and work together? I realize that this is perhaps a wildly optimistic solution, but we have few if any other options.

Is environmental protection a luxury that only the developed world can afford? When I visited China in 1989 on a tour of Chinese wildlife preserves, I saw farmers in southern Yunnan Province clearing forests to create new rice paddies. Each year a few more hectares of forest disappeared as new paddies were formed to increase the yield of rice. These forests are the only remaining habitat for the few elephants left in China and the elephants are losing the fight against agrarian encroachment. The solution may appear obvious to us, no more forest clearing. Save the elephants! But when we look at it from the farmer's point of view, those newly cleared hectares of land can make the

difference between survival for his family or continuing poverty and perhaps starvation. These farmers do not have the luxury of considering the elephants' survival; it is their families that they must protect. Clearly, developing policies to improve environmental education and conservation is far more complex than simply curbing deforestation.

The government of Botswana has found one solution to the choice between farming families and the preservation of the indigenous animals that share their land. Here when faced with a similar problem, the government opted to make conservation a viable alternative to agriculture. A small game preserve has been created near where a village of poor farmers stood. The goal of this game park, however, is not as a refuge for large numbers of animals; it is far too small an area for that. Rather, its mission is to educate the children of Botswana about conservation and the rich natural heritage of their great wildlife treasures. Most of the villagers now work in the game park and their standard of living has risen substantially as a result of a prosperous tourist business. But the real success story of this small park will be realized in a few years when the schoolchildren of Botswana who have visited the park's educational center can begin to influence public policy and conservation programs. Approximately 12,000 children a year visit the park for a day or two or three and participate in a range of programs designed to engender pride and respect for their environmental resources. This park has simultaneously improved the local economy and environmental education. I came away thinking that Botswana still has a chance to get it right.

But, what can we as individuals living in the States do? I am not a climatologist or ecologist, and sometimes I, as perhaps many of you, feel frustrated that there seems to be little that we can do to make a difference. Maybe we should look to theology for help in understanding of our personal responsibility. A statement on Buddhist ecology taken from the website of the Alliance of Religion and Conservation tells us that, "Buddha taught people to live simply and appreciate the natural cycle of life. Craving and greed only bring unhappiness, since demands for material possessions can never be satisfied and people will always demand more, so threatening the environment. This is why the real solution to the environmental crisis begins with the individual." "The real solution to the environmental crisis begins with the individual." That means you and me.

Like the students who take the straight path through Harvard and wind up in consulting or ibanking or medical school without having explored alternative pathways or taken a chance on different routes, it is much easier and more comfortable for us to stay the current course. But we do so at our peril. We must study alternative solutions even if they require sacrifice and seem difficult or unpleasant.

I believe that one thing that we as individuals can do is to promote education and as is often the case here at Harvard, the undergraduates have been leading the way. This fall, The Harvard College Environmental Action Committee offered a series of film screenings and debates on the topic of global warming. They showed both An Inconvenient Truth by Al Gore and The Great Warming, a film that looks at where faith comes to bear on climate change (and several of the Harvard chaplains participated in the discussion following the screening). They have also encouraged dialogue between the Harvard Republican Club and the College Dems on solutions to climate change. Traditionally, our universities have been communities that have encouraged international

scholarship and dialogue. We, as an international community of scholars, do have a real opportunity to make an impact. Our universities must provide places wherein the technology needed to solve these problems can be developed. We must become educated and continue to educate the leaders of today and tomorrow. And finally, we as a community of scholars must continue to provide a forum for international dialogue and action to solve a worldwide problem.

Let us assume for a moment that we could put aside our differences and work together to develop the technologies needed to create alternative fuel sources, reduce pollutants in the atmosphere, and become more prudent in our use of the earth's diminishing natural resources. What if we were able to forget our differences and concentrate on our common problem? The result might have an impact far beyond reversing the environmental damage we have caused. Suppose that we truly could beat our swords into plowshares (or our tanks and bombs into windmills and solar panels), might we not find new ways to work together toward common goals for all of mankind? The problem impacts all of us; perhaps the solution can as well.

Closing Prayer:

God's World

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists, that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this:
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

Edna St Vincent Millay

Morning Prayer – Harvard – 1/6/2007 – Howard Georgi

Psalm 71 (New American Standard Bible) verses 1-12

1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
Let me never be ashamed.
2 In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
Incline Your ear to me and save me.
3 Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come;
You have given commandment to save me,
For You are my rock and my fortress.
4 Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man,
5 For You are my hope;
O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth.
6 By You I have been sustained from my birth;
You are He who took me from my mother's womb;
My praise is continually of You.
7 I have become a marvel to many,
For You are my strong refuge.
8 My mouth is filled with Your praise
And with Your glory all day long.
9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
10 For my enemies have spoken against me;
And those who watch for my life have consulted together,
11 Saying, "God has forsaken him;
Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver."
12 O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, hasten to my help!

Today is my 60th birthday, and though I have only been 60 years old for a few hours now, it doesn't seem **that** bad. 60 years is a long time, to be sure. It is scary to think that I met my wife Ann (Coach as the Leverett students call her) over 40 years ago. But I'm hopeful that things won't fall apart all at once. Still, I am not sure I believe that "60 is the new 30," so this seems like an appropriate time to figure out what to do about aging. If and when I do get old

and tired, what should I do differently? Will God help? Or will religion just complicate matters?

Like the Psalmist, I **am** concerned about my strength failing me – more so because to some extent I have always defined myself by my energy level. I have some other talents, but perhaps my greatest asset is that I have never needed much sleep, so I have simply been **awake** much longer than most people my age. For example, back in Junior High School and High School, I used to get up at the crack of dawn and the most interesting thing to do at that hour was to watch science and math professors lecture on Sunrise Semester, the first educational TV show. I didn't decide to learn physics. I just provided the energy, and physics found me! But energy is restless, and over the years other outlets for my energy have found me – first research – but then mentoring graduate students – undergraduate teaching – crusading for women in science – and most recently being a House Master, so that I have really had many overlapping but very different careers. This is not something I could have planned. Of course each of these vocations has cut into my sleep – but each has always been a labor of love. I am constantly thankful that I have had these opportunities, and that Coach has put up with the crazy lifestyle for all these years.

My other worry about growing old is that I have seen too many older people get exasperated with young people – and I don't want to do that, because I love to be around people much younger than I am. This is probably obvious since I regularly teach freshman and sophomore physics courses and I have survived over 8 years as a House Master. But I have also loved really little kids since the moment my eldest son was born. This is one of the things that got me involved in the Episcopal Church again as an adult and, along with Coach, caused choral singing find me in my late 30s. Choir is now a regular and important part of my life, but I still smile broadly when the kids are released from Sunday school and wreak havoc on the liturgy.

Having formulated these concerns for myself, I realize that my attempts to figure out what to do about aging are doomed to failure. 60 or not, I am not going to start plotting a detailed course for the future. God would probably

just laugh. I will simply do my best to continue as I have done – to greet each morning as it comes with whatever energy I can muster – trusting that somehow, new things will continue to find me when the time is right.

There are a couple of things that I hope Coach and I communicate by example to our Leverett kids and all the young friends I hope we can continue to have. The first is that it can be a mistake to meticulously plan their careers. If they are lucky and put their hearts into it, they will be found by not one career, but many. The second is that our blessings are not earned or deserved – they find **us**. We may help with our energy – but no matter how hard we work, our successes and our failures are gifts from God **for** which we should be profoundly thankful.

Before the hymn (which I chose because the last verse is such a wonderful evocation of choral singing), let me read as a prayer the words I wrote a few years ago to music from a Russian Orthodox Chant, producing the piece that the choir sang so beautifully in Coach's morning prayer yesterday.

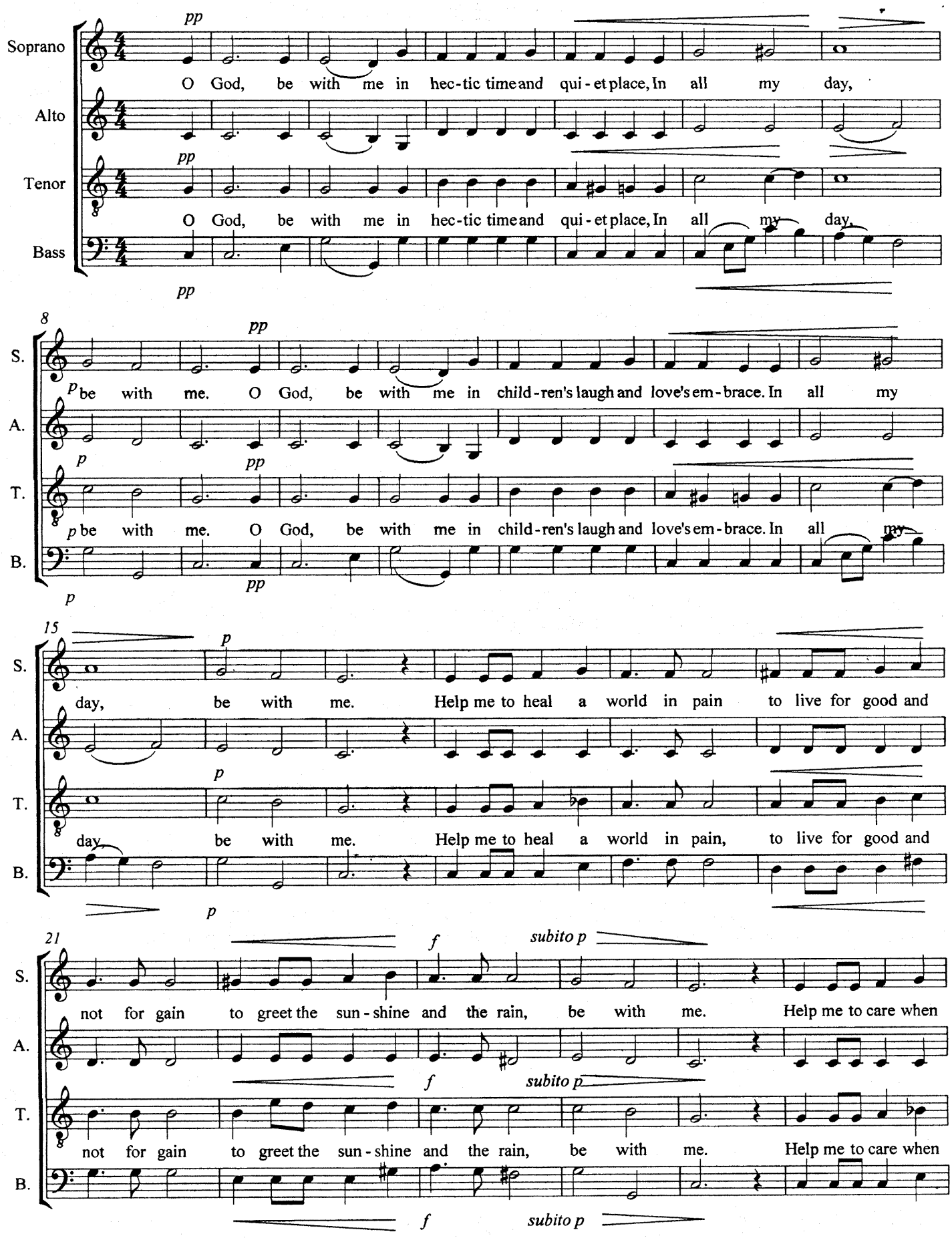
O God, be with me in hectic time and quiet place.
In all my day, be with me.
O God, be with me in children's laugh and love's embrace.
In all my day, be with me.
Help me to heal a world in pain, to live for good and not for gain,
to greet the sunshine and the rain. Be with me.
Help me to care when people cry, to feel thy hand in earth and sky,
to find thy work in all I try. Be with me.
Dear God, all my day, be with me.
Amen.

Hymn – 16 – Ye Holy Angels Bright
- here is the last verse -
My soul, bear thou thy part, triumph in God above:
and with a well-tuned heart sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days till life shall end,
whate'er he send, be filled with praise!

O God, be with me

Howard Georgi

Russian Orthodox Chant



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S. peo - ple cry, to feel thy hand in earth and sky, to find thy work in all I try, be with

A.

T. peo - ple cry, to feel thy hand in earth and sky, to find they work in all I try, be with

B.

f *subito p*

33

S. me. Dear God, all my day, be with

A.

T. me. Dear God, all my day, be with

B.

pp

37

S. me. A - men, A - men, be with me.

A.

T. me. A - men, A - men, be with me.

B.

pp