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Abstract of the doctoral thesis:
ECOTHEOLOGY.
AN ASPECT OF THE CHURCH MISSION

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Keywords of the research paper: ecotheology, ecological crisis, deforestation, mission, Church, creation, human being, priest of creation, macrocosm, conversion, metanoia, repentance, asceticism, monasticism.

MOTIVATION

1. Argumentation of the theme

The topic of the present paper has been established in agreement with Father Professor Mihai Himcinschi, the coordinator of the doctoral thesis, seven years ago. The title of the work started from his wish to highlight a yet unapproached connection in a proper research developed in the autochthonous Orthodox theological environment: ecology and theology under the spectrum of the Church's mission. At the same time, it was aimed that through this work an expression of contemporary reality to be outlined, revealing a major interest in the problems related to creation, to our nowadays world, to the numerous ecological imbalances, as well as the concern of our contemporaries that the care for this wonderful gift of life and our salvation to be manifested completely.

The last decades have revealed an intense, ample and major concern for the improvement of life on earth, but also for the deepening of Christian spirituality and the development of some theological concepts to support this noble, important and necessary endeavor.

Many studies, articles, chapters, sub-chapters, paragraphs and footnotes have been written on this topic, but, up to the present moment, there is no theological work that specifically deals with the aforementioned connection.

Having accepted the theme and the proposed title, it was opted, as can be seen throughout the work, not only for an approach to the concept and reality of the ecological crisis from the strict point of view of Orthodox theology and the tradition, but this sphere of interest was also broadened to Roman Catholic and Protestant theology

Thus, out of the desire to combine, within the systematic theological discipline- The Orthodox Missiology, in which the present research is framed, both the missionary factor and, mostly, the interconfessional factor, a more exhaustive and imprecise title of the work was chosen: *Ecotheology. Aspect of the mission of the Church.*

The need to deal with this subject emerges from the actuality of the ecological problem, of ecotheology, but also from the increased importance that the pastoral mission of the Church is focused on. The care for the creation, which our children learn during the Religion class, we also find in the pastorals of some hierarchs, but also in practical activities of some Eparchies or the Romanian Patriarchate.

The fact is that especially the events of the last period have deepened the special care that Churches, nations and peoples must have for our planet. Especially the massive deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, the multiple fires there or in Australia, the hurricanes and storms, the long periods of drought and heat, accidents such as the Fukushima or older, such the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, raise many concerns about environmental issues.

Because the Earth is our only real living environment, we have a duty to keep it as unaltered as possible, by human intervention that produces imbalances, but of course, without falling into the neopagan rhetoric that would like to reduce the population or extinction of mankind on the principle that it is the main polluter and damaging of nature. In this contemporary environment, dominated by atheism, religious indifferentism, secularization, globalization, migration, war and crises of all kinds, especially the economic-financial and banking type, the ecological problem comes to deepen some controversies, to raise questions and, above all, to bring new perspectives in our relationship with creation.

The constant, massive and rapid degradation of creation requires awareness of the ecological crisis, but also commitments, concrete and urgent actions to stop this nefarious contemporary phenomenon. We must have the awareness that the Earth is the gift of God. Thus, the Easter vocation of the being, including creation, namely that the beautiful and perfect world that God created that later was impacted by the sin, is intended for purification, declension and deification, theosis, through man, who is the priest of creation, meant to unite in himself both the material and the spiritual sides.

Ecotheology is the theological answer, the ecclesia to the ecological crisis and the way Christians see this problem and the solutions they propose. It contributes to rediscovering the importance that creation has for us, the humans, but also to how we must connect ourselves correctly and normally to it. The Ecotheology confers us the possibility of seeing the world as a great gift, the masterpiece of the Creator, full of grace, of the divine presence through uncreated energies, but it also gives us true moral principles in order not to aggress it and to respect it at its maximum value.

The ecological crisis brings before us the problem of the survival of the man closely related to that of the integrity of the earth, therefore, we have the duty to promote the value of creation, to involve ourselves in the education of young generations, and from a missionary point of view to trigger a change in a much the better regarding the relationship of man with his own living environment. This is because nothing that God created is destined for destruction, but for deification and eternity.

2. Purpose of the study/research paper

The purpose of this research paper is the depiction of an invitation for the scientific world, for all non-governmental organizations that have achieved an ecological imbalance and the devastating implications, primarily of a social one. This awareness, on their part, that something needs to be changed is materialized through the countless effective steps taken over the years, either through an ecological education (the way we must behave in nature), through conferences and various writings, or through the search for bio alternatives to the burning of automobiles' fuel (electric cars, etc.) or the production of electric energy.

One of the most vocal organizations, globally, is Greenpeace¹, which since its creation, about fifty years ago, it has carried out actions on land and at sea in accordance with the principles of non-violence to protect the environment and promote peace. Today, it remains true to the original mission of the founders. Greenpeace's first actions were aimed at combating nuclear energy and protecting the oceans. Greenpeace has gradually expanded its fight: the fight against climate change, the fight against pollution from toxic products, the protection of forests, the denunciation of NGOs and pesticides, the promotion of renewable energies and organic agriculture.

All these initiatives are very useful, but not enough. This is because the fundamental cause of the ecological imbalance must be sought within the inner (spiritual) imbalance of the person who produces and perpetuates it, within the man. And all the millenary teaching and practice of the Orthodox Church on man could be helpful and lasting for all alternatives discovered through science. While the science involved in finding solutions on this ecology platform aims to make the entire environment to be a clean and sustainable space where human life is lived decently. The Orthodox Church is aware of what the cosmos is to the man, which is his place and role in the universe, and which are their destinations in an exalted interweaving ,God-man-environment.

¹Greenpeace is an international network present in 55 countries, on all continents and oceans thanks to its 28 national and regional offices and regional and scientific sciences, including the famous Rainbow Warrior II

This does not bring an existential injury to man or a change in decency, but an addition of constitutive responsibility and great joy of immediate effect.

3. Documentation data base

Since this work has been approached from a confessional point of view, it brings together sources from different Christian confessional and, in some cases, from outside the Christian spectrum. It is the elements of systematic theology, historical theology and biblical theology that prevail in the work, in all three chapters of it. At the same time, the elements of practical theology are not lacking, being present, especially, in the approaching of the third chapter. Below listed are the sources from which the sources of the work were selected, omitting the virtual ones from which they were purchased in a pdf version, books, studies and articles mentioned in the attached bibliography at the end of this paper. The sources are:

1. The personal library;
2. Library of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Bogis-Bossey;
3. The library of the Protestant Faculty of Geneva;
4. The library of the Lutheran Faculty of Arusha, Tanzania;
5. National Library of Romania in Bucharest;
6. The county library „Ion Heliade Radulescu” from Targoviste;
7. Antim Monastery Library in Bucharest;
8. Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Justinian Patriarchul” of Bucharest;
9. Library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Targoviste;
10. Library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Alba Iulia;
11. The library of „Saint John Chrysostom” Orthodox Theological Seminary of Targoviste;

4. Research stage

In the elaboration of this work, I started beginning the compulsory readings from the Faculty of Theology, from the courses of Dogmatics and Morals, of Missiology and of the Bible, but also from my theological concerns which have given me an impulse in discovering this field of research, in general, and to this scientific theme, in particular.

The world in which we live is subject to many changes: ecological imbalances, adjustments, all almost imperceptible because God endowed creation with a wonderful capacity for resistance, adaptation, and, but also self-adjusting. The initiatives of some Orthodox theologians or hierarchs regarding the ecological spectrum encouraged me to start this approach in order to clarify certain aspects of Orthodox eco-theology, but also to clarify within my ecclesial and theological community certain nuances of this approach.

The most encouraging initiatives, the most worth remembering are the writings of the Holy Fathers as: Saint John Chrysostom with his work *The first homilies on Genesis*, the, Saint Basil the Great with the *Homilies at Hexaemeron, Ascetic writings*, Saint John Chrysostom through the works *The first homilies at Creation, Homilies on repentance*, St. Gregory of Nyssa who wrote *About the creation of man, About the Life of Moses*, Saint Maximus the Confessor with the works *Ambigua, Philokalia*, or *Collection from the writings of the Holy Fathers* that shows us how one can be purified, how to enlighten and perfect himself.

From Western space a major contribution had Origen with the work *Homily, commentaries and annotations to Genesis*. And among the initiatives of contemporaries can be mentioned the one of His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I regarding the Black Sea ecosystem and the one of John Chryssavgis and Bruce Foltz *For an ecology of transfiguration. Orthodox perspectives on the environment, nature and creation*, by Elizabeth Theokritoff through reference writings *Living in the creation of God. Orthodox perspectives on ecology* and *The Orthodox Church and the environmental movement* by Anastasios Yannoulatos with his book *Orthodoxy and the problems of the contemporary world*. The the Roman –Catholic, the Encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, is also necessary to be mentioned and from the Protestant space, the theological writings of Jurgen Moltmann. They encouraged me to deepen this theme having the sense of its usefulness.

The research project deepens in the ideas, premises and certainties of important theologians, both within the Romanian confessional spectrum and in the entire Christian confessional spectrum. In this research project we started from fundamental works in the field, both theological and secular.

5. Research methodology

Regarding the research method, carrying out an interdisciplinary theological analysis, I have used several methods. Thus, the historical method helped me to recall the most important stages in the crystallization of the two Christian traditions, the eastern and the western, as well as the Protestant theology, bringing into attention data from the apostolic era to contemporary times. This historical journey is necessary in order to identify the fundamental principles that define the thinking materialized by Orthodox tradition and theology. The comparative method has also contributed to a better understanding of what defines the Orthodox specificity. This was evidenced in relation to the Western and Protestant doctrine. The analytical method helped me to explore contemporary challenges, due to different theological developments, which the Orthodox Church must respond to in the exercise of her missionary and ecumenical work in the world today.

The synthetic method was used whenever I tried to formulate some answers to these daily challenges with implications for the future. The practical method inserted in the elaboration of the research facilitates the concrete implementation in the daily life of Christian virtues, which determine the human being towards an analysis of conscience and, implicitly to a manifestation conforming to his dichotomic constitution since creation. This will lead it to the fulfillment of existential purpose and everything that surrounds it.

6. Research Limitations

If in this work I have analyzed the spiritual causes of the ecological crisis, the beginnings of ecology and the church's relation to it, at the same time, by proposing and analysing concrete and necessary solutions to limit the adverse effects of this crisis and the solidar responsibility of the contemporaries, this does not mean that it represents the end. Thus, a permanent renewal and development of the methods, means, realities, programs inserted into the ecclesial life, at a practical level, of the relations between the Church, is assumed, governmental or non-governmental institutions and scientists to make man responsible for his relationship with himself, with God and with the environment. Also, churches will face challenges such as environmental pollution through various forms, secularization, globalization, atheism, consumerism and

materialism nowadays landmarks for mankind existence. The crisis usually raises questions, brings up tensions, but also offers the possibility to find the fastest and most reasonable solutions. The crisis is a time of the judgement of God, but also a time of awareness of a situation which has to be changed and improved.

In our contemporaneity, various disasters and imbalances show us the dimensions of this ecological crisis and urge us to take steps, fast, practical and educational measures, that should stop the development of phenomena before they could become irreversible and affect our lives massively, intricately and badly. This research paper can therefore be considered as a warning sign of the spiritual and moral crisis of contemporary man, on his abusive activity and a call to a conscious dialogue that reflects the importance of each one in the creation of God, with immediate impact in the future.

Conclusions

At the end of our journey in the first chapter of this paper, it can be emphasized that the roots of the ecological crisis are of a spiritual and moral nature. The spiritual crisis and the moral crisis are expressed through the gestures of violence, of abuse of the human being on what surrounds him, aiming the immediate effect of profit or of the feeling of mastery. However, the breaking of the bond between man and the rest of Creation, through the committing and the idolatry of sin, is not in God's plan. The temptation of material constitutes spiritual impoverishment. Under these tendencies of spiritual, moral, and cognitive indifference is created a vicious environment in which virtue is replaced by secularization, globalization, atheism, consumerism, and materialism. The contemporary postmodernist man begins to have an opacized view of the world around him, of the existence of other human beings and of his existential purpose, for the instinct and desire to own became values, they are authority. Thus, losing his authentic values (given by creation) of a dialogical being, man implicitly loses his authentic connection with himself. And in that moment in fact he diminishes, no longer finding himself in the things normally does, no longer feeling the joy. Everything is relativized by conceptualization and all become truths by simple affirmation. At the same time, under this vision it is transformed into a market where everything is for sale and purchase. Every thing and every being in the world is assigned a price.

The world, creation having this superficial attitude over it, distorted by the passions of man, is alienated from its purpose, the one of being transfigured. Thus, the world is no longer seen as the one that carries within it the touch of the Creator and the uncreated energies through which

He is ever present, are completely ignored. That is why today, more than ever, it is revealed that our world is plunged into a terrible and serious ecological crisis, .

Man, instead of reconfiguring his quality as the crown of God's creation, the quality of its priest, intercessor between Creation itself and God, the one who has received it as a gift and has the duty to return it to him eucharistically, with his love, as an offering and sacrifice to the Creator, becomes, through the pleasure of accomplishing sin, the aggressor.

It simply empties of meaning its relationship with God to be further asserted its reason. Overwhelmed by the tendency of individualization, man transforms himself into a dominator of creation. The person is understood as an individual, and the personality as individualism. Thus, as the oppressive master of creation, man experiences a paradox: although it seems to him that it is asserted, in fact it manifests itself liberally, manifestation that leads him to the emptying of his higher sense.

Under these conditions man projects what comes unhealed from within to his neighbor and to the world, because there is no repentance and collaboration with divine grace. Also in this act of terrorist domination over creation, man manifests a state of dependence or possession on the part of the evil which by definition, as we know from Scripture, it is Holy Tradition that separates, destroys, introduces disorder and chaos, and manifests itself as an agent of the disintegration of creation, as in a hatred of the Creator to destroy his work.

Creation is no longer perceived theophanically, as a special language of God, which has embodied in all that there is the special language of His love, but as a liquid language. This indifference to the presence and work of God, to his own spiritual vocation, becomes a spiritual, spiritual, serious affection, which causes man to lose, not to find, he said, or find the purpose of life.

The lack of discernment and responsibility, abuse and greed, lead man to intervene destructively on nature, to disrupt its natural order. This happened also with the massive deforestation, which in the past represented an agricultural necessity (multiplying the population created the need to gain agricultural and residential land), however, today it is an abuse. And this abuse took place precisely in the forestry field, which has an essential role in the Earth ecosystem. Massive deforestation (especially between 1989-2007) creates a real ecological catastrophe that endangers human life and leads to major and irresistible transformations of our world.

But because, in reality and in truth, the property of the earth belongs to the Lord, not to the human being: „Al the Lord is the earth and its fullness; the world and all who dwell in it” (Ps 23:1), and the true calling of man according to his constitution, it is to deify himself and in the process of transfiguring everything that surrounds him “in a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), he, the man, the man, he is called to exercise his capacity as priest of creation. And this is not just for the environment to regain its balance, only to create from the cosmos a good “house, clean” for a high quality of life in the present and in the future, as the Protestants and neo-protestants argue, through their theology, but to sanctify it, to turn with pure conscience of God to God, Eucharistic.

At the end of the incursion of the second chapter it can be stated that the situation of man and human life, as well as his relationship with himself, can be stated, with the environment and with God, he occupied a central place in the philosophies and religions of all time. Over time human life in its complexity was understood as differently as religious ideologies and beliefs were. None of the world's religions are up to the conception of man that Christianity develops.

This return of the human being should not be seen as a loss, as a poverty, but on the contrary, as a proposal that opens up prospects for us. It is therefore imperative that the phenomenon of the ecological crisis be dealt with in the light of Christian theological values and truths. Because the Christian attitude regarding the existence and treatment of the ecological crisis is different from the contemporary technical solutions or environmental movements.

Thus, through the voice of the entire Christian Church (ecumenical space), the, in the face of the danger of ecological imbalance with profound social (loss of human lives) and spiritual (the reality in which nature manifests itself repulsively towards the one who would fulfill it, not as „un dat”, but as „a brought” to this state), man is called to clearly understand the special place he occupies, as the end of creation. The human being is seen as a bridge by virtue of the fact that in his dynamism from Chip to the Similarity to God, he said, man has the natural holy mission of making more evident God who is transcendent and immanent at once.

For an evolutionary path, for a correct attitude towards what is given to him as a gift, man should realize that he is not alone in the cosmos and has things as greed dictates, it is meant to stimulate the image of the Son of God in Him by the likeness of God.

Assigning in virtue with God, which is an effect of theanthropic synergism, since it is achievable by the help of divine grace and personal effort. For a misinterpretation can lead him to

a crisis of identity with serious effects on his life and the lives of other people, as well as serious ecological effects, in which nature rebels.

As to the manner of the human being's behavior in order to reach the fulfillment of its existential meaning, Christ the Savior is the Prototype.

Also, as a result of the third chapter, we note that no one could say today that Christian churches are not concerned about the good of the environment or are not considering its sustainable development. However, members of various Christian parishes and communities have not always been informed or taught on this subject, but have done their best to implement local programs, counties through which people of all ages are aware of the value of creation and the beauty of the spiritual state following the dynamic and living dialogue with God.

Throughout history, the world has experienced many wounds due to the irresponsible activity of man, but the Church offers them the solution of communion and love, of responsible education. Although the world is a mystery, a mystery, we, the people, are invited to include it in our communion with God, to decipher its meaning and purpose, because theology is always only and only about life, about eternal life, about hope and about trust.

Today, when the quality of human life is increasingly spoken of in the sense of ease, comfort and luxury, the Church, on the basis of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, it is the one that deepens the rich, multiple and profound meanings of life, from the perspective of immortality, in relation to ourselves, our neighbor, the world and God. In an increasingly secularized and technicalized society in which people pursue the attainment of happiness by emphasizing the idea of consumption, rejecting the existential reality of God, The Orthodox Church proposes ascetic practice in relation to Creation. By this, people are called no longer to look at the constitutive elements of creation as objects that would satisfy personal greed, but as gifts that presuppose responsibility and love. At the same time, this does not mean either starvation or material poverty, not an absolute renunciation of the materiality of creation, in the sense of punishment, but a harmonious use by rediscovering the balance, to the extent of the needs necessary for survival

Also, people are called to conversion as an endless progress in this life, an unceasing ascent that leads to metanoia and, ultimately, identifying the personal life with the Savior Jesus Christ, as St. Paul the Apostle testified: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, vwho loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20).

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