

**“LUCIAN BLAGA” UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU**  
**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY “ANDREI ŞAGUNA”**

# **SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

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# **THE CREATION AND THE CHURCH. AN ORTHODOX APPROACH OF ENVIRONMENTALISM**

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**Keywords:** relationship among God, man and cosmos, environmental destruction, creation, environmentalism, eco-theology,

Is the Christian view on man and world obsolete? This is the challenging question discussed by this thesis – its main topic is the approach of the current environmental issues from a viewpoint other than the scientific one.

Science from the perspective of self-sufficient, unreligious reason revolves around the unknown, around the mystery, but it cannot take a glimpse of it. While in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cosmologic determinism had the world viewed as a machine – things exist as such and are interlinked by exterior laws -, the new theory of the universe, drawn up in the recent decades by science, makes a transition to an energetic concept of the world, which relies on the idea of reciprocal relationship. Nevertheless, in view of a holistic idea science tries to acquire on the world, some scientists turn to Oriental and pagan doctrines and thought systems rather than to the fundamental aspects of patristic Christian theology. In other words, the Cartesian approach that led to an overemphasis of the intellect is not replaced with the eastern perspective on knowledge, built on the cataphatic-aphatic/ rationality-mystery relationship, but with the pagan and Pantheist oriental perspective. Various types of oriental spirituality, which are even awarded a permanent scientific and social status, are embraced rather than eastern spirituality found beyond a pantheist and deist mysticism.

Matter is not only energy build-up; it is also a concentration of rationality, and the inner rationality of the cosmos, which involves the antinomic existence of the entire reality, creates the premises of a dialogue between science and theology, between reason and mysticism, between God and man. In the new image of the world, the notion of reason has become, filtered by reality, complex and antinomic; it is now normal to join the principle of distinction and of unity for the understanding of reality, while at the same time plurality does not disrupt unity and unity does not abolish plurality; plurality is built in unity

and unity occurs in plurality. Via the balanced relationship between reason and mysticism, Orthodox theology avoids both “total apophaticism” and the exacerbation and autonomy of reason, by looking through clear unity at theology and iconomia, at the creation and salvation, at eschatology and at history and by enabling, past any kind of dualism, the personal meeting between God and man.

The Apostolic Fathers and, later, the Apologists contributed – aside from the time specific mistakes – with essential insight to the drawing of an authentic Christian cosmology, by introducing the biblical term *creatio ex nihilo*, which involves the created-uncreated distinction, as well as some aspects of the theology of Logos and some aspect of triadology. The first Fathers emphasized the Eucharistic dimension of the creation, the order, the beauty and the unity of the creation, as well as its doxological aspect – all these would be formulated increasingly more deeply and precisely in the following centuries. The liturgical and sacramental dimension of the Church played an overwhelming part in the interception of all the philosophical and religious doctrines and systems Christians were filtering in the fire crucible of the Liturgy and of the Sacraments. Thus, when they drew eastern cosmology, the Fathers of the Church did not relate to the already existing cosmologies, which could have trapped them; instead, they related essentially to the New Testament revelatory truth, by purposefully applying both the Hebrew cosmology and the Greek one and even exceeding them. An important feature this thesis probes is the adulation (idolatry) of the creation, an aspect approached critically both by the ante-Nicene Fathers and by the post-Nicene ones. This path change – from the Creator to the creature, the confusion between Creator and creature – has cosmologic and theological implications, as well as deep soteriological effects, because the salvation of man occurs within his relationship with God in and through cosmos. Idolatry is a severe cosmology error. This is why the fundamental idea I kept emphasizing in this paper is that soteriology does not

concern anthropology alone; it also concerns cosmology. The man and the cosmos share their soteriological fate. The man and the cosmos are seen from an eschatological perspective, because the entire creation will be renewed and reestablished at the prime beauty, at the primordial transparency and even more. The cosmos acquires transparency and transfiguration via the holy man, via the godly man who is in a loving ascetic and mystical relationship with Jesus Christ, the Savior of the whole creation. The paradigm attached to the structural renewal is Christ's resurrected and transfigured body; the paradigm for the realism of the transfiguration of cosmos and man is the realism of the human kind's transfiguration in Jesus Christ.

#### *Purpose of the thesis.*

Our thesis tries to summarize Orthodox teachings on "ecology", by using the scriptural and the patristic foundation of these teachings. Next, we try to establish a series of fundamental principles of Orthodox eco-theology, because only in this way can the Orthodox mission bear any relevance to the modern man. Of course, this measure of relevance is marked, on the one hand, by the identification of the most severe problems and, on the other hand, by the finding and the application of the most adequate solutions. This is how the permanent nature of the Gospels can be emphasized: despite some "grim prophets" predictions, Christianity is not dying; on the contrary, it is alive and it nourishes each generation of people.

#### *Documentation*

We have to acknowledge, however, the scarcity of Orthodox sources. Few theologians approached the theme of eco-theology or of theo-ecology from an Orthodox perspective. We note several more important names – also because

of their almost singular undertaking: Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos<sup>1</sup> and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I<sup>2</sup>, to whom we add Alexander Schmemmann<sup>3</sup>, Alexander Kalomiros<sup>4</sup> and the Metropolitan John Zizioulas<sup>5</sup>, and in Romanian Orthodox theology priest. Ilie Moldovan<sup>6</sup>, as well as Dumitru Popescu<sup>7</sup>, Tache Sterea<sup>8</sup> and Cristinel Ioja<sup>9</sup>.

### *Stage of research.*

In the last years, environmental topics have increased considerably, exceeding the scientific stage and becoming a dominant mass-media concern: television, newspapers, internet etc. This actual “ecologic boom” turns the issue into one that cannot be approached exhaustively. At the same time, however, from the perspective of the starting points (scientific evolutionism, law of natural

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<sup>1</sup> Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane*, transl. in Romanian by Gabriel Mândrilă and Constantin Coman, Ed. Bizantină, Bucharest, 2003; Id., *Mission in Christ's Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts/ World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Bartholomew I (Ecumenical Patriarch), *Encountering the Mystery. Understand Christianity Today*, Doubleday, New York, 2008; Bartholomew I (Ecumenical Patriarch), John Chryssavgis, *In the World, Yet Not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, Fordham University Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii – Sacramentele și Ortodoxia*, transl. in Romanian by Aurel Jivi, EIBMBOR, Bucharest 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Kalomiros, “Sfatul cel veșnic. Câteva gânduri privitoare la înțelegerea biblică și patristică a creației lumii și a omului”, in Ioan Ică, Alexandros Kalomiros, Andrei Kuraev, Doru Costache, *Sfinții Părinți despre originile și destinul cosmosului și omului*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> John Zizioulas, *Creația ca Euharistie*, transl. by Caliope Papacioc, Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Ilie Moldovan, *Adevăr și preamărire în Ortodoxie. Îndreptar de texte scripturistice comentate în vederea apărării liturgice a drepte credințe*, Ed. Pro-Vita Valea Plopului, 1999; Id., *Calendarul viu – dialoguri euharistice între generații* -, Convorbiri realizate de către Părintele Ioan Nicolae, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2007; Id., “Iisus Hristos - viața lumii. Viața religioasă autentic creștină ca temă de discuție ecumenică”, in *MMS* no. 4-6 (1983), p. 167-191; Id., “Sensul și condiția deschiderii Ortodoxiei spre lume, privită ca lucrare a Sfântului Duh”, in *Biserica în era globalizării*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2003, p. 216-234; Id., “Criza ecologică din vremea noastră și pruncuciderea generalizată, ultimul cult al vărsării sângelui nevinovat. Punctele de vedere ale Ecoteologiei ortodoxe”, in *Îndrumătorul Bisericesc* 2004, Sibiu, p. 123-131; Id., “Înnoirea lumii, factor decisiv al realizării unității creștine contemporane”, in *Identitate creștină și dialog în noul context european*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2006, p. 225-236.

<sup>7</sup> Dumitru Popescu, *Le soupir de la création*, Geneve, 1982; Id., *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2005; Id., “Raționalitatea creației și implicațiile ei”, in O nr. 3-4 (1993), p. 31-35; Id., “Secularizarea europeană și conștiința ortodoxă a creației”, în GB nr. 1-4 (1997), p. 5-8; Id., „Logosul divin și unitatea creației într-o lume secularizată”, in GB no. 9-12 (2003), p. 49-54; Id., “Învățătura ortodoxă despre prezența lui Dumnezeu în creație și importanța ei pentru societatea contemporană”, in “Buletin Științific”. Pitești Faculty of Theology, Series Teologie Ortodoxă vol. I, 1996, p. 53-60.

<sup>8</sup> Tache Sterea, *Dumnezeu, omul și creația în teologia ortodoxă și în preocupările ecumenismului contemporan*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Cristinel Ioja, *Homo economicus. Iisus Hristos, sensul creației și insuficiențele purului biologism*, Ed. Marineasa, Timișoara, 2010.



selection, animist religions etc.) and from the one of the given methods and solutions (pacifistic approach, ample public manifestations, direct confrontations with the representatives of large corporations or of state institutions, withdrawal from civilization etc.), the literature could create a feeling of confusion to the Orthodox Christian man who takes an interest in these aspects.

The topicality of this subject relies on the following aspects: challenges deriving from environmental problems – destruction of the creation, as well as from answers, because Orthodoxy, on a biblical-patristic foundation, approaches the issue of the creation differently from the secular one. Furthermore, there are new-ageist and syncretistic projects that also challenge the Church to provide a real Christian answer. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the center!

This Christological centrality attached to the approach of the creation-related problems, as well as its theological, ethical and soteriological implications, is also obvious in the aforementioned Romanian and foreign Orthodox authors. Indeed, the reader may identify at them a series of fundamental principles of an Orthodox eco-theology, with biblical and patristic roots; on the other hand, there is no synopsis of these theological elements and we think that this is where the importance and the “originality” of this thesis can be found.

### *Work method*

The approach of this topic in this thesis is interdisciplinary. First, as suggested by the title, we raised again the issue of the environment from the viewpoint of biblical creationism rather than from the one of scientific evolutionism – the latter is the origin of most of the specialized works on ecology. Therefore, the basis of our justification is given by biblical and

patristic sources and by contributions from Orthodox theologians. Additionally, we focused on the missionary inspiration the Orthodox Church should hold when it considers an approach of environmental matters. Thus, some aspects described in the chapters of our thesis dealt equally with dogmatic, liturgical, moral and missionary subjects. The final chapter of the thesis uses, apart from the theological or analytical method, the comparative method, describing the theological principles of eco-theology only after a prior listing of environmental laws.

### *General framework of the thesis*

The structure of the thesis includes four main chapters, preceded by an introduction for the argumentation and the topicality of the subjects, the purpose of the research, the documentation, the stage of research etc. In the end, we have drawn a number of conclusions, followed by the list of abbreviations, the general references, the curriculum vitae and the academic integrity statement.

The first chapter, titled The Creation, the gift of divine love, has six subchapters that outline the biblical-theological starting point of the tackling of the creation issue. This is the creation of God in three hypostases, which means it relies on maximum love communion. The trinity model of the creation is obvious starting from the Book of Genesis, which is based on the description of nature and of the purpose for the man's and the world's creation. This is a dialogue of love, an environment for the manifestation of interpersonal communion. Unfortunately, this environment is altered by our forefathers' fall, a rebellion with negative repercussions on the entire world. Nevertheless, divine providence also occurs after the fall, and God's eternal plan for the man and the creation, although with its frames shifted, remains unchanged. This is how we need to understand the manifestation of divine love in the incarnation of God's eternal Son. By Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension, the human nature and

is changed ontologically and the entire creation is given the possibility to change and be re-sanctified.

The second chapter shows that *The Church is the “laboratory for the Resurrection” of man and of cosmos*. The extension of the redeeming work from Jesus Christ to all the people occurs in the Church, particularly through the Sacraments. They are also the proof of another goal earned by the material world after the Incarnation, as anticipation of the future world in God’s Kingdom. It is only in the Church that the world discloses its true meaning – to be a space of the loving interchange between the Creator and His creatures. The eschatological meaning of the creation shows, however, that now the man lives between the “already” and the “not yet” – integrity being related to Parousia rather than to the current state of the creation.

The third chapter, as a reaction to the current economic and ecologic crisis, outlines a series of *Fundamental principles of Orthodox eco-theology*. Here, we remind the purpose and the means for the fulfilment of the creation’s fate through and in man. But not as an arbitrary act, but as a free and responsible act, derived from the answer required from the Creator – God to the gift of creation. Man’s living in the world should be viewed from the angle of the ultimate answer he will give at the Final Judgment. Hence the importance of asceticism – a method of authentic relation to the material elements as gifts through which God requests we answer His call for love, rather than as things as such. We can see that overcoming the egoism of the human being, the irrational and irresponsible manifestations toward the creation is possible in the image of the saint who is observant both of God or man and of animals or plants, ultimately, the entire world.

After a presentation of the definition and laws of ecology, the last chapter also weighs on the eco-theological approach of the creation. This chapter of the thesis is par excellence “missionary”, owing a lot to two Orthodox theologians

who lived and worked at the Sibiu Faculty of Theology at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: fathers Ilie Moldovan and Ion Bria.

The conclusions tried to select, in clear and concise marks, the fundamental principles that, from the viewpoint of Orthodox theology, can lie beneath the mission of the Orthodox Church. They become the more necessary and current as the economic and environmental issues seem to become more severe and the sciences seem unable to answer adequately and to provide valid solutions. In fact, Christianity holds a doctrine and liturgical backdrop the (post)modern man ignores dramatically, which has negative consequences obvious both at personal level and at the social-community one.

Contemporary Orthodox theology has been and is concerned with the issue of the world as God's creation. This concern is not strictly theoretical, because the emphasis on the world as God's creation also raises (necessarily) the issue of man's responsibility – he was, after all, created “in God's image” – toward this creation. These theological aspects are still valid to the present theologians, an aspect that has been described conclusively in this thesis.

1. The Bible has shown that there is no discontinuity between man and the world, that the human being cannot be removed from the remaining creation and cannot be redeemed outside it. Created in “God's image” and requested to obtain the “likeness” with Him, man goes above the world, transcends it, but this does not mean he abandons it. The person is a reason of creation because, on the one hand, salvation occurs in the world and, on the other hand, the cosmos finds its meaning only in man. Our forefathers Adam and Eve were placed in Heaven to accomplish its beauty. By naming the creatures, man confirms his divine traits, such as the quality of being a master and a rational being. In fact, these two traits are related: by rational mastering of the world, man had to “gather” within the reasons or the spiritual essences of things (*logoi*) and thus to offer them to divine Reason (*Logos*).

2. “God speaks to man through the world” – wrote Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. By receiving the uncreated grace, God’s omnipresent glory, the original creation reflects the divine Wisdom, the divine beauty and truth. It is not a neutral objects; instead, it incorporates the Creator’s word or reason. It bears the seal of Wisdom because through it man is called to commit to a dialogue with God. Hence the responsibility and respect to the surrounding world – because, in its order and with its rhythms, earth is God’s sign and sacrament. Thus, the vision of man as a “symphony of the creation” is not at all hyperbolic.

3. Unfortunately, man’s fall altered this “symphony of the creation”. The sin reverberates not only at the individual level, but also at the collective one. The reason – on the one hand, people are interdependent and, on the other hand, they are interdependent with the world in which they live. The disruption of the relationship between man and God and, therefore between man and other men, the sin worsened and keeps worsening the nature; the latter can only follow the human kind, bearing the burden of man’s madness. Man’s greed, vanity and ignorance scar and destroy the earth.

4. God’s image in man and the glory robes of the creation were darkened, but not abolished, after the fall. The history of salvation continues, as shown by God’s covenant after the flood, but this covenant included death thenceforward. The triumph of sin and of death occurs through incarnation and resurrection: triumph over death occurs through Christ and the path to deification is thus open. Some Holy Fathers, particularly Saint Maximus the Confessor, emphasized the cosmic dimension of Christ’s Body. He undertakes and transforms the world, for the Incarnation and the Resurrection potentially recreated the entire universe.

5. Our Savior Jesus Christ, true God and true man, assumed human nature in order to allow people to become gods in grace. But this possibility also redefines the fate of the creation: Christ allowed man to receive the Spirit and,

thus, to save and transfigure gradually the creation as anticipation of the Eschatological Kingdom. This is the “Sacrament” of the Church, the heart of cosmic life. In the Sacraments of the Church, through epiclesis, matter answers its original call – to be the environment of the communion between man and God, respectively among all the people. Thus, after the Incarnation and the Pentecost, the beautiful universe, which however has to die, encloses the church which, in reality, carries and changes it. At its Evangelical, Baptismal and Eucharistic core, the Church does not focus only on the salvation of human kind, it is also concerned with the salvation of the entire creation. This is obvious and peaks in the Eucharist, where the bread and the wine are enabled to receive God’s Presence and to be actually transfigured.

6. The anticipation of the Eschatological communion of the Kingdom within the Church, “here and now”, triggers a specific attitude toward the world at the Christians, an embrace and a promotion of a Eucharistic Ethos. The Church confirms the necessity to “change the mind” (*metanoia*), i.e. overturning the vision on the world. Orthodox askesis does not aim to destroy matter, nor does it aim to abolish the body. They should be transfigured, because the purpose of fasting is to overcome the selfish insatiability of the fallen condition.

7. Life in the Church, as commitment to the Christian condition, does not reflect exclusively on the place of worship. One of the contemporary Orthodox fathers, Saint Silouan the Athonite, said that “the man who prays in his heart has the whole world for a church”. This is a perspective completely different from the postmodern one which relies on utilitarian grounds. To conclude, liturgical ethos emphasizes indeed the collective nature of the Eucharist: it is a sharing, a communion with Christ and, within Him, with the other brethren, a communion that cannot be limited. To the law of fasting, of self-limitation, Christians are to cope with a so-called consumerist civilization, but which, in fact, concerns only a minority. The Christian view of the world is not, therefore, limitative; it is holistic. Care for all the people and for the entire

creation is a consequence of the free and universal gifts of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

8. The saint is the living proof of the communion in love not only with God and with one's fellows, but also with the whole cosmos. Therefore, he is the model, the testimony offered by the Orthodox Church with the "just teaching", to the other religions and to the entire world. By following the law of holiness, of sacrifice, the contemporary man can escape the crisis, because this crisis is not as material as it is spiritual. By restating the theological principles on creation as God's gift to man, the Church continues the universal mission of sanctifying the world. It is what some contemporary Orthodox theologians defined as "eco-theology".

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the human kind was harassed and dominated by two forms of social organization: by the Occident's capitalist mentality, which fostered selfish individualism, and by various types of totalitarian regimes, which involve the risk of levelling the crowds under overt or covert dictatorship, under various slogans or naïve Messianism. The effort of European Occidental humanism to develop a theory of humanity that could disperse and replace the Christian idea led to the linking of the concept of person to the autonomous morality or simply to a humanistic philosophy. But the person, as notion and as life experience, was born and defined by the Christian theological thought, particularly that of the Greek fathers. Hence one of the most significant contributions of Christianity to the modern man's mentality: his rediscovery of an authentic community of love, in the image of the Trinity intercommunion. Abstinence and askesis are associated to the belief that each person is an organic part of a huge whole, the whole of the animal and vegetal world and that it does not have any right to waste natural resources for its exclusive good. When we deal with human rights, we often consider only people who live in the same time segment with us. But this is a mistake: we should also remember that history is in progress and that our generation will be

followed by other generations. Future generations should also have the right to nature, health, life; urgent issues relating to air, food, sea, pollution, scarce energy and many other aspects, should be considered from the viewpoint of the future generations' human rights.

Environmental laws rely on an evolutionist idea of life and ignore completely the theological principles of divine Revelation. This thesis analyzes in detail the latter, because they can be a basis for a transition from ecology to eco-theology, and the view on creation as God's gift can generate an ethos that, in the end, could answer the problems raised by the requirement of a vision secularized by the modern man.