

**„The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it!” (Psalm 24: 1)**

**Benchmarks for a dogmatic and social eco-theology**

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**I. ECO-THEOLOGY AS THEANTHROPY**

**In the beginning there was the Reason**

Matter has always been considered to be good since it originated in God. It was the result of will, given to man to manage and use, and as such it serves as an instrument that enables man to acknowledge the authority of the Maker and provides him with a favourable living environment. Matter was offered to man for use before the original sin, yet its harmony with him was maintained even afterwards. Man coexists with matter until the end. Theology teaches that the Universe has a rational Creator and that it fulfils its preordained vocation in relation to Him. It is clear that what God judged to be “good” was not only the form of His work, but rather the essence and the role of the material world in relation to the Logos. Matter is a part of the Creator’s eschatological plan. If one failed to grasp the meaning and the fate of creation, faith would become an ideology, and the biblical truth would dilute into systems of thought.<sup>1</sup>

The mystery of creation lies in God’s unfathomable will, manifested outwards through the uncreated divine energies present in matter. The Father is “*the Maker of heaven and earth*”, who works through the Son (John 1: 3) and sustains and leads matter into the eternal life through the Spirit, which the Holy Scripture calls “*life-giving*” (John 14: 16 or 15: 26). The world is the work of the Holy Trinity, a shared work, brought about by the profusion of love of the one divine being, a unity of divine origin in harmonious diversity. St. Basil the Great stated, in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, that “*The Father is the founding cause from the beginning, the Son is the creating cause, and the Holy Spirit the acting cause*”.<sup>2</sup> That explains why, after bringing the visible world into existence, God saw that “everything was good” (Genesis 1: 31). The Son, the Logos or the Reason, summons the creation and brings it back to the Father through the Spirit who assists or incites the matter to respond to the Creator in its own fashion and attain perfection. The visible world is the result of the communion and the creative relationship of the Trinitarian Persons. The communion of the three Persons participates actively in the objectivisation of God’s plan to bring matter into existence out of nothingness and into a diversity worthy of the Creator’s perfection. According

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Gannet, *La création*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris 1979, p. 18, apud Adrian Lemeni, *Sensul eshatologic al creației*, Asab Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 128, note 127.

<sup>2</sup> St. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto*, P.G. 32, 136 B.

to Dionysius the Areopagite, the creation is the bringing to light of all that is concealed in God's precepts, through the gradual involvement of the basic elements (water, earth and air) towards a complex diversification up to the structure that is closest to God's image, i.e. man.

Man, the complex creature created in the Son's image, is given the dignity and responsibility to participate in organising matter by consciousness, wisdom, love, intelligence, which are all exclusive features of the human person. All that exists is proof of the fact that through creation God goes beyond impassibility, emerges from supra-unity and creates the phenomenal world.<sup>3</sup> In this light, nature is the expression of love, as God, being love, goes out of Himself through the act of creation to pour out His love<sup>4</sup> and gives man equal responsibility in guiding matter towards the sublime transfiguration in the Lord: "For the same reason, all souls and all the other entities owe their life and bliss to the One who pre-exists. In Him they exist and are blissful; from Him they begin; in Him they are preserved; in Him they die; [...] He is the creative beginning and the middle and the end of all that exists".<sup>5</sup>

### **"Everything was very good" (Genesis 1: 31)**

God's creations can only be good. The value of creation is mainly attributable to its author and also to the destination it was granted: to be the life environment for living beings. Its value verges on the ineffable in that it becomes the medium and the site of the incarnation of the Son of God,<sup>6</sup> the site and state through which human nature is deified, i.e. the place where God's Kingdom is established. The created universe is a magnificent stage on which mankind passes from the state of fallen creation to that of deification. The eschatological destiny was implanted in its self, so that it should be transfigured, since man's salvation is not separate from that of the universe. Rather, the redeemed man takes matter along with himself to the Creator, according to the injunction given in the Garden of Eden.

Therefore, matter potentially bears sanctity in itself, yet not by itself or on account of its usefulness to man, but by what God embedded in its very essence, namely the harmony and the beauty that are testimonies of its creator. Through it man connects with the true God; history shows that those who failed to understand this persisted in "venerating the creatures", as is the case of primitive religions.

The teaching about a monolithic creation, even having its origins in God, yet reduced to the object status, has led to the "secularisation" of nature. Regarded as external to man, matter turned into an object of exploitation. The humankind's concern for ecology as an independent and self-sufficient subject carries

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<sup>3</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ierarhia cerească și ierarhia bisericească*, translated into Romanian by Cicerone Iordachescu, Institutul European, Iași, 1994, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Louth, *Dionisie Areopagitul: o introducere*, translated into Romanian by Sebastian Moldovan, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1997, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ierarhia cerească...*, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Insights from Orthodoxy*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1990, p. 3.

the risk of pantheism, a teaching that attenuates God's transcendence and also the risk of the conviction that man is able to solve the major problems of eco-systems on his own irrespective of God the Maker. The phrase eco-theology combines the notion of man's shared participation and responsibility in God's work in the visible world and also avoids politicising distortions.

### **Man in sacred matter**

God's "image" in man is Jesus Christ, who in God's timeless precepts, represents the Person in the Trinity who would become man. Man was made in the image of God as a part of the created world, with a life spirit. Bearing God's image did not represent an independent state of the human nature since Christ alone is "the image of God" (II Corinthians 4: 4) by nature. The "likeness" to God which man is called to perfect is the work of the grace of the Holy Spirit who adopts him and makes him similar to and a brother of Jesus Christ. In the ensemble thus created, only man consists of material and spiritual elements. Human nature is hence clearly differentiated from all that is created but is not human, by its content and quality. The Church Fathers called man a "microcosm". In so doing they intended to show that the human body incorporates all the levels of existence of the material world, which preceded it in the created order, that it is not ranked below the other creatures of the physical world, which it actually subdues. Made of earth, on the sixth day, man is the quintessence of earth and a crowning of creation. One may say that the world is integrated in the human being and vice versa.

The German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg states that many creatures have the "life spirit", but man is unlike them in that he does not simply have a life spirit but is "the image of God" beyond which no evolution is possible.<sup>7</sup> He transcends the material world, participating in God's life through grace, consciously, as a link between the two worlds, the material and the spiritual. This role makes him the trustee of the integrity of the created universe He was to be aware that he rules it towards the natural vocation.

As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, St. Gregory the Theologian confirms that man is connected with the material world by his physical nature. The human nature does not travel alone on its path towards deification. It carries along a part of the created nature wherein it existed. If man turns away from God, the world joins him in suffering (Romans 8: 19 – 22). This reveals the meaning of man's capacity and obligation to exert his "ruling" over the earth, being fully accountable for the destiny of the work of God's hands (cf. Genesis 1: 28). Through creation, man becomes king of creatures, priest and steward, all of which indicate that he must show affection for the things making up the surrounding world; a king without love for his subjects becomes a tyrant, a priest becomes a mercenary, while a steward turns into

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, T&T Clark Ltd, Edinburgh, pp. 189 sq.

a robber. Man's dignity, conferred through the creation, is to make creation perfect by opening it to God, by sanctifying it and by his own deification.

### **“Strangers in a country not their own” (Acts 7: 6)**

By his desire to become God without God (Genesis 3: 5), man lost the meaning of his own life, in that his relationship with his living environment was reorganised according to other principles, opposite to the original vocation, as the Apostle of the Gentiles shows: “There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practise deceit; the poison of vipers is on their lips; their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3: 11 – 18) While the man of Paradise experienced creation as a gift from God, amid perfectly harmonious organisation, after the fall he has shown disobedience of the Creator, enmity for his neighbour and estrangement from nature with tremendous consequences.<sup>8</sup> In the Holy Scripture, “Paradise” was a “garden” (Genesis 2: 8) that God gave to the first pair of people to tend with responsibility and love. The misuse of freedom led to the corruption of matter, giving it features that made it transitory and perishable. The result was the twofold separation of man: from God, as seen in the attitude of the original couple who sought to Him and from the site they had been placed in, with which they no longer felt any communion.

The account of creation provides the magnificent image of a familiar universe, where matter is subject to God's will: the sky separates from the earth, the seas calm down and everything enters a process of logical organisation, alteration or conflict. Man was planted in a familiar environment, being called upon to “rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1: 26), or to “minister” and “preserve” it. The biblical account shows that the rational human being was the first creature that opposed divine reason. Using matter for a purpose that he considered to be good, namely “knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3: 5), he ended up also taking what he did not need, by an arbitrary decision, irreparably causing the estrangement and the break from the universe, a conflict that was to end through Christ, but which is latently present as long as sin exists (Genesis 2: 16). The hidden side of sin was the pride of the human in

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<sup>8</sup> The corresponding biblical texts are: Genesis 3: 11-12 “Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat? The man said “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” – disobedience; Genesis 3, 15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel,” in the form of Cain's fratricidal cruelty – enmity; Genesis 3: 17 – 18 “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you ‘You must not eat of it’, cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field.”- the estrangement from nature.

his relationship with the One who created him; disobedience transformed use into abuse. One can therefore argue that the ecological concern is not a recent issue; it has now become very serious in its visible effects. It is not limited to water, earth and air independently, but extends to mankind's physical and spiritual health and its awareness and desire for salvation. Adam's sin was, *inter alii*, a revolt against moderation,<sup>9</sup> and it resulted in suffering, misery and death (Genesis 3: 16). Paradise ceased to be a beautiful and hospitable place for the sinful man who abandoned it, bearing the burden of responsibility for all that was to be until the end of time. Man was required to "minister", that is to rule over the Paradise, in agreement with the high principles that God had implanted in him. Sin caused him to be convinced that he had a unilateral and autonomous right to reign and exploit for the sake of ephemeral prosperity and the indulgence of desires that offer the illusion of happiness, independently from the Creator.

According to the biblical account, the degradation of the environment is not a question of physiological life and death, but one which relates to the eternal life.<sup>10</sup> The loss was infinite and its effects are visible down to the core of human nature: concern for property and consumption, transformation of necessity into gluttony, of sentiments into passions, and of need into desire.

### **Life-giving earth**

God embedded a unique inner power in the earth, which has produced, in cooperation with God, highly evolved forms of life. Possessing the power to make the land bring forth vegetation and life, the Jewish people understood that land belonged to God and was not meant as an object of trade: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants." (Leviticus 25: 23) God's control of the earth is the doctrine that links theology to economy. God created the earth and everything on it, loves it and guides it towards the heights of divinity, making it more than a mere object.

At creation, the earth received the power to bring into being marvels of life and such beautiful things as the myriad creatures, scents, colour and shapes (Facere 1,11). As it constituted the basic element of man's materiality, the earth is treated as being "someone" and receives God's gifts, as gifts can only be given to a person.

God's Kingdom itself is established on earth, according to the heavenly model, as indicated in the Lord's Prayer and matter will eventually make up the "new earth". From the first to the last chapter of the Holy Scripture the earth goes from non-existence to transfiguration. Considered in all its complexity, the

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2000, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> M. Polany, *Personal Knowledge, Towards a Post-critical Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, p. 118.

earth appears as a huge organism, a mystery that enables the human being acknowledge God's power, mercy, love and goodness. In some prayers, the earth is personified<sup>11</sup>, becoming "the compelling visible symbol of the great work by which God shares his love"<sup>12</sup>.

Through the making of man of earth, by God's hands, dust becomes a part of the human being. Man is earth in the most concrete sense of the word, due to his own perishable nature. Yet man is much more once we see that he is perpetually in motion: work, nourishment, knowledge, contemplation, sacrifice, science. By knowing earth, man gets to know himself, as he is the bodily self and one with the whole universe. The earth therefore "grows" together with man, through love and respect. Man tends to miss this point and take things for granted. Earth is so present that man fails to notice it. One can make a reference to the imaginary documentary *A Chairy Tale*, by Norman McLaren și Claude Jutra<sup>13</sup>, in which the chair refuses to allow any person to sit in it so long as they are occupied with other things (reading, eating) and do not pay any attention to it. Only when the person understands how important the chair is for them does the chair allow them to sit and the two become one. By the same token, man and earth were created for shared existence and assistance towards the transfiguration through grace. Every major event in the life of mankind has also involved the life environment.<sup>14</sup>

After the fall, the tension between the natural world and the human nature replaced harmony: man began to dominate and exploit the earth beyond his own needs, which he interpreted in a hedonistic manner, a passion that is a point of reference in the history of humanity. Corruption and disintegration were ultimately expressed by decay and death, when the earth again receives man. The fear of death has caused men anguish, anxiety, hatred and despair. The need to evade death has caused them to seek refuge even more intensely in the material elements, which in the end generates life not death. Disorder has taken various forms characteristic to each period of history, economic exploitation, racial oppression, social injustice, war and genocide being all the consequences of the fear of death and the collective signs of its presence in human nature.

Modern man manifests his true position in relation to earth in two ways. Outwardly, through the desire to dominate it by science and technology, seeking to extract ever more from earth as part of the process inaptly named "development". The motivation presented is that productivity is required to feed the ever-expanding population. In reality, development only benefits a limited number of people who have economic interests.<sup>15</sup> Economic development creates victims mainly among the poor and increases

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<sup>11</sup> A prayer said in times at danger from earthquake shows earth suffering under man's attack and crying out: "*Why, all people, do you pollute me with so many evils?*"

<sup>12</sup> Scott McCarthy, *Creation Theology: An Earth-Centred Theology of Worship*, San Jose, Resource Publications, 1987, p. VII.

<sup>13</sup> A Canadian production, known as *Il était une chaise* in the French version, first staged in 1957, still broadcast and distributed in modern performances due to its powerful message.

<sup>14</sup> One could mention the catastrophic flood, when all the created being were punished. (Genesis, chapters 6-9)

<sup>15</sup> According to recent statistics, the wealth of the three richest people in the United States equals that of 600 million people.

the gap between the richest and the poorest people. Approached according to the evangelic precepts, it would have a wholly different role. Inwardly, man tends to become a slave to the world, by becoming attached to sensuous things.<sup>16</sup> Western theology fell in this trap and for a long time promoted prosperity independent from creation and religious life. In 1961, for example, in ecumenical circles, it was stated that: “Christians must look at scientific discoveries as new steps towards man’s domination over nature”<sup>17</sup>. No more than 40 years later, when the effects of man’s “domination” were perceived, at the conference at Basel, Switzerland, in 2005, it was] stated that: “Man must be a servant of the earth. We are concerned that the ecological and social situation is deteriorating” [...] “Despite all scientific and political declarations and warnings, too little is being done and often too late about many of the critical problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, air, water and soil deterioration.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Water – the blood of the planet<sup>19</sup>**

Starting with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, water has been a part of the agenda of scientists and theologians as a critically important topic, given its unique role in maintaining life and because of the serious issues caused by the lack of water. Water is a central issue for the United Nations and the worldwide Church fora that affirm the right to water of all people and the risks entailed by the recent phenomenon of “privatisation of water”.<sup>20</sup> From a theological point of view, water is not an inextinguishable means that ensures a comfortable life, but a resource that must be shared equally among all people. Orthodoxy has a rich liturgical ritual that features water, which it blesses and regards as the symbol of the Life-giving Spirit Itself.

In the Holy Scripture, water is very often present at the crucial stages of the history of Salvation that one may speak about an actual “theology of water”. One ought to mention two examples in the New Testament where water holds a central place. The first is Christ’s meeting with Nicodemus (John 3: 1 -

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, *Ortodoxie și contemporaneitate*, Diogene Publishing, Bucharest, 1996, p. 194-195.

<sup>17</sup> W.A. Visser’t Hooft (ed.), *The New Delhi Report*, London, SCM Press, 1962, p. 96, Wesley Granberg – Michaelson, *Creation in Ecumenical Theology*, in the volume *Ecotheology. Voices from South and North*, edited by David Hallman, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> The conference specifically called on the Churches to: instituting a feast celebrating Creation day, each year at the beginning of September; rediscover the eucharist as the place where God is already healing creation; promote education for sustainable living in the churches and in the national curriculum; reduce energy consumption and use green electricity; form relationships of eco-justice between rich and poor communities; reconsider the use of car and air travel; implement sustainable agriculture, use and recycle resources and finances in the church communities; value water as a resource indispensable to life, called the „blue gold”; learn about, protect and enjoy the diversity of nature. An extensive material can be consulted at [www.ecen.org](http://www.ecen.org).

<sup>19</sup> Phrase used by Callum Coats, *Living Energies*, Art Publishers, Sydney, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> At The Fourth Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network at Volos, Greece, in 2003, water was the general theme. The same topic was dealt with extensively at the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006, where it was shown that the privatization of water has tremendous social consequences, leads to displacement of people and is an attack on the dignity of the human person. There is even an International Water Convention set up by the United Nations.

21), when water is said to be the only material element that mediates the entry into life eternal. The second is Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 4 – 42), where water is said to be "alive", and the well, deep.<sup>21</sup> Water is alive when drawn from the depths of earth and kept in stone-walled wells.<sup>22</sup> Researchers have shown that when water loses its curative qualities and even the freshness that quenches thirst when it does not go through the entire process of purification and mineralization or when the soil filtering it is polluted. The moving water (in springs or rivers) is connected to the human consciousness to which it communicates certain messages about the mysteries of the material world. The Japanese scientist Masaru Emoto thinks that water even reacts to mental stimuli, positively to feelings of love and gratefulness and negatively to anger and hate, like a living organism.<sup>23</sup> After all, man is 90% water at birth, while during the whole lifespan water represents on average 70% of the human body .

Science currently confirms what theology stated intuitively a long time before, when it formulated sanctifying prayers which reveal the curative and cathartic powers of water in the action of the Holy Spirit.

„[...] Be present now through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water! Count us worthy to be filled with your sanctification through the partaking and sprinkling of this water. And let it be for us, Lord, for healing of soul and body.”<sup>24</sup> or „Make it (the water) a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, an averting of diseases, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic strength.”<sup>25</sup>

### **The restoration of nature: Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world**

God's care for the universe was made manifest in the pouring of the Spirit out in the creation. The Spirit was present from the beginning over the waters, and the prophet Joel proclaimed to his contemporaries: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people; your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” (2: 28 – 29) This is a testimony of the profusion of the Spirit in the world.

The Son of God in His turn, when the times have reached their fulfilment, becomes incarnate in order to restore the world to life, through sacrifice and resurrection (John 1: 3). He becomes a complete man to enable the human nature to reclaim its actual vocation: deification. At the end of his earthly

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<sup>21</sup> Olof Alexandresson wrote a book with the title *Living Water* (Gateway, Bath, 1982), an introduction to to Viktor Schauberger's discoveries, which show the phenomenal properties of water, which mankind is hardly aware of. Water “lives”, emits reactions, “feels” and “dies”. See also Masaru Emoto, *Mesajele ascunse din apă. Puterea rugăciunii*, translated into Romanian by Laura-Corina Miron, Ed. Adevăr divin, Braşov, 2006, p. 18 sq.

<sup>22</sup> Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, *Apa cea vie a Ortodoxiei*, Renaşterea Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2002, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> Masaru Emoto, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>24</sup> Rugăciunea la sfinţirea apei, *Aghiazmatar*, EIBMBOR, 1992, p. 179.

<sup>25</sup> Rugăciunea de sfinţire a apei la Botez, *lucr. cit.*, p. 33.

activity, He sends the Holy Spirit to confirm the restoration of the whole creation: “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2: 3 – 4 and 17, an exact replication of Joel’s text). The model of the restoration was the Mother of God, who became Christo- and pneumatophorous, rendering humanity compatible with divinity. Through humanisation, God communicates His will “to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Christ” (Ephesians 1: 10). In other words, Christ made Himself man, restored and renewed the creatures, uniting them with the Creator in and through Himself. The Lord Jesus is the only one who acted as emperor, priest and servant of creation. He showed mankind the way to understand the ruling of nature by His ministry and care, moderation and gratitude, obedience and holiness. Christ is not an authoritarian Lord of creation so long as He accepts death and sacrifices Himself for its salvation. He does not forsake and exploit, but sanctifies and guides.<sup>26</sup>

The miracle known as the “multiplication of breads”, presented in the Holy Scriptures, has dogmatic and ecological connotations: it is not a creation out of nothing, but a multiplication of existing matter (five loaves and two fish). The ecological message of the account is the Saviour’s care for ALL those present, for the 5,000 men, plus the women and children, and also the concern to “gather the pieces that are left over” (John 6: 12). One can easily observe that nothing from God’s gift should be wasted, neither personally nor as part of a community event. The text provides several enlightening conclusions for our topic: what we have is the gift of God’s goodness; man’s duty is to cultivate, God is the multiplier; man must take from nature only what is needed and only when needed (the crowd were hungry); man must make a minimal contribution (five loaves and two fish is nothing compared to the quantities needed to feed several thousand people); Christ does not create out of nothing, because the act of creation was complete; God’s gift must be received carefully and orderly (the people sat down on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties. Cf. Mark 6: 40 and Luke 9: 14); after receiving the gift man must not waste what is left over, for everything that comes from God is given out of generosity and is not intended to be wasted.

### **Matter – the object of God’s and man’s love**

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<sup>26</sup> As the Lord, he admonishes the waves, drives away demons, heals paralytics, crippled and blind people; as servant, he does not own property for “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9: 58); as high priest, he ministers, blesses, consecrates, comforts and forgives.

Fr. Dumitru Staniloae wrote extensively about the love that made God bring everything into existence.<sup>27</sup> Everlasting love is manifested in the creation of the world and the redeeming work, which is effective in each person that enters into communion with the Lord through the Sacraments<sup>28</sup> There is nothing that does not bear the mark of God's love. When one truly loves, one experiences eternity in time; so long as one loves someone else, one desires that the subject of one's love live for ever. Extrapolating, one could say that if one loves nature, one helps it to live eternally. There is much discussion about safeguarding the creation and specific ways and means are sought. What would be the reason why something needed to be saved? There is only one answer: love, for one cannot save that which one does not love.

Besides the role of servant, man is asked to be a king of creation. A good king is one who loves his subjects, otherwise, sooner or later, they will revolt against their lord. "Man the king" was not commanded to subdue nature through humiliation or for fulfilling his own selfish desires. Ruling over the earth means guiding it towards God, not claiming it for oneself. Ruling involves moral and spiritual transformation that should mainly concern the self.

Man is also called to be a priest of creation, in that he should bring as sacrifice, purify and offer to be sanctified everything that is material. He talks with God on behalf of all creatures. The Orthodox tradition manifests this dimension through the cultivation of theocentrism in all the expressions of religious life. Theocentrism is the sign of the freedom of the human person to choose a road that was different from Adam's, a guarantee of genuine repentance. As a priest, man humbly accepts primarily God's authority. It is not unintentionally that every consecration prayer in the Orthodox tradition includes a secret part when the priest performs an act of individual repentance, of forgiveness and humility before approaching the matter that is to be transformed so that the Holy Spirit should purify him and afterwards the gifts or the matter. Only when in a state of repentance can man become a receptacle of the divine activity within creation. The Church has preserved in its liturgical life a special attitude towards matter, raising the awareness of the faithful of the true purpose of matter. This is best reflected in the formula used when offering the Eucharistic gifts of the bread and wine to God, when the man, on behalf of the creation says: "Your own of Your own we offer You, in every way and for every thing!"

The Eucharist is always celebrated after the service of Vespers, a symbol of creation and God's care for the living creatures: "When you open your hand they are satisfied with good things. [...] when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. (Psalm 103: 28 - 29).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Orthodoxy

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<sup>27</sup> The teaching about the Trinity itself is developed starting from the concept of love. The title of his last book is *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost Iubirea* [The Holy Trinity or In the Beginning There Was Love], EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Especially *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia ortodoxă*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> A paper on this topic: Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Vision of Creation*, in TV, 5-8/2007, to be published.

has nothing to add to ecology but proposes a changing of attitude towards the destiny of creation, by transformation, sanctification and glorification of material elements.

Out of responsive love for God and his neighbours, man can contribute to restoring the harmony between God, man and environment. Contemporary theologians have formulated a series of theological criteria that should form the basis of the re-construction of this relationship: the equality of men, expressed in the teaching of the Church Fathers by their common origin, their divine call to share equally human nature and destiny that involves similar duties, rights and responsibilities for everyone. Following the example of God's justice, all people have a right to life on earth, as one family of God, so that it is not permitted that some of them should consume more than others. Man was commanded to subdue the universe but only in order to use it rationally and enable its salvation. Land, air and water are elements that must not be privatised as they are God's gifts, vital for maintaining life and cannot be multiplied or produced; exclusive ownership, concentration of assets and property inevitably give rise to conflicts and inhuman acts such as stealing, fraud, robbery and injustice. Christianity regards even bequeathed property as having questionable origins. Private ownership leads more or less obviously to passions such as avarice, violence, injustice, spoilage and theft. According to the Church Fathers, it creates discord, conflicts and wars. Ownership of land was rejected in the early theological writings as it leads to idolatry. Wealth is positive when one avoids idolatrousness and the excessive attachment to it, and can be redeeming if it is shared with members of the community in their needs. The Bible establishes thus the validity of material goods and confirms their evangelic value only when they lead to the practice of virtue (*Acts 2 and 4*) and the cultivation of the common good.

### **The ecological crisis or the suffering of earth**

The involution of the climate and the state of the environment in general have caused theologians and specialists in ecology to speak of "sin" when referring to the relationship between man and the environment.<sup>30</sup> The ecological issue is not simply a fashionable topic in *theology* and *technology* when the effects of the unconditioned exploitation of the earth's resources are conspicuous and dramatic. Water pollution, the exhaustion of non-renewable resources, the destruction of the ozone layer, the unprecedented increase of the level of nuclear radiation, the desertification of large areas are no longer accidents but actual unnatural states that cause suffering to the earth and indirectly to man. The land, which under God's authority was meant to bring forth vegetation, begins to dry up because of human activity. The land's power of life is constantly affected by poisoning and straining. Its barrenness is unnatural and in contrast to Paradise, which was described as a garden with luxuriant vegetation.

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<sup>30</sup> The Bishop John of Pergamum, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. In a speech to an audience of 1,800 people at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, David Attenborough declared that „waste is a sin” (Richard Chartres, *We have failed planet Earth*, in „The Tablet”, September 2006, p. 6.)

Man's irrationality is the step through which all covenant with God the Maker is broken. The prophet Isaiah provides a description of this state of things: "The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, he exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant." (Isaiah 24: 4 – 6)

Science and technology are gifts from God that are applied on earth. Misused by man, they lead him to a slow death, so that modern culture has rightly been called a "culture of death". Calls for controlled, programmed and just development, for a more equal distribution of assets and for a more moderate style of life are either ignored or suppressed<sup>31</sup>, as science has been subjugated by economy. Biotechnology and genetical engineering cannot be rejected since they can bring new insights in the fight for life, if they are approached in the light of the Holy Spirit because without proper knowledge of the transcendent vocation and of the spiritual nature of mankind the new techniques can lead to biological imbalances that can cause mutations with disastrous effects for the existence of life on earth.

Human creativity and freedom are positive so long as they are rooted in the divine wisdom. According to Rev. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, the problem of modern man lies in the pathological need for autonomy in relation to God. Man has created his own secularised culture whose ideal is to subdue nature for selfish purposes. It is important to realise how humanity, in 80,000 years of earthly existence, did not change the environment as irreversibly as it has in the last 200 years of industrial development. Secularised culture has been accompanied by certain theologies that have made a radical separation between the natural and the supra-natural, mistaking transcendence for God's absence from creation, even before the establishment of the principles of the Enlightenment.<sup>32</sup>

The restoration of creation today means above all sincere and unconditional repentance and the determination to put into practice a new life style that should be accepted and applied by the whole of humanity. The contemporary world must first acknowledge the abuse and the mistakes it has committed in its relationship with the environment, put an end to them, reevaluate its attitude towards nature, which should be united, just as the relationship between the soul and the body are in the human being, and realise that ecology is more than simple conservationism. Pollution can be, if not stopped, at least reduced, since the life of the planet itself is at stake.

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<sup>31</sup> There is the notorious case of the Rosia Montana exploitation in the Western Carpathians, Romania. Yet there are many other cases. For example, around Lake Victoria in Africa, there used to live tribal communities with ancient traditions and culture who relied on fishing. With the arrival of the big Western industrial fishing companies the social and natural ecosystem was destroyed, which forced the native inhabitants to migrate, the local culture was wiped out for economic reasons, there was poverty, depletion of the lake's fish population and pollution of the water because of the excessive industrial activity.

<sup>32</sup> Rev. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, *Toward an Orthodox Ecological Education: Theological and Spiritual Principles*, manuscript, p. 3. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, T&T Clark Ltd, Edinburgh, 1993: „Man's separation from religion occurred as early as the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. Faith in a simple and transcendent God of the Bible led in fact to the de-divinisation of nature and to it being transferred to us to rule over it"; p. 204.

## II. ECO-THEOLOGY AS A SOCIAL ATTITUDE

The biblical-dogmatic account should not cause one to consider that it is time to restrict or oppress human life in favour of nature, as if one abuse should be repaid by another. It is clear that the terrestrial eco-system cannot be conceived without man. What specialists in the field recommend is that “the human social system interact with the environment”, the social system comprising individuals, groups, societies and societal systems.<sup>33</sup> As part of a unique system, eco-theology has the opportunity to put into effect in social life certain voluntary moral, dogmatic, social and economic actions. It can facilitate a more efficient fight against certain social phenomena such as poverty, urban concentration of population, genetic modifications, population growth, deforestation in tropical areas, water pollution, etc. Such an approach could be initiated focusing on a few models.

### **The educational model**

The year 2005 marked the beginning of the United Nations’ Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).<sup>34</sup> Man is the only created being that can be educated, an aspect that must be considered seriously, from the basic social element, the family, to the creation of global educational consciousness. Several European political initiatives have been launched, such as the Committee for Ecological Policy of the United Nations’ Economic Commission in Europe (UNECE), which adopted a strategic educational plan for sustainable development, not only at the institutional level but in all of society.<sup>35</sup> There are also church bodies such as the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN),<sup>36</sup> which promotes ecological initiatives at institutional levels.

Orthodoxy can shape environmental education through its teachings on the divine energies, present in creation, and the eschatological destiny of matter. Eschatology has played a major role in Eastern theological developments and can help one find solutions to the concrete issues of governing the material world. Orthodox eschatology has a realistic outlook compared with later, panicky and absolutist, eschatologies, due to the fact that it makes use of history and cosmology.<sup>37</sup> Orthodox Christianity considers that every opportunity must be used to act so as to encourage the community to pay more attention to nonpollutant science and technologies that are intended to facilitate the process of restoring the integrity of the earth. The key moment of the Revelation was Christ’s first coming and his restoration

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<sup>33</sup> Eduardo Gudynas, *Social Ecology: The Latin American Route*, Montevideo, CIPFE, 1990, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> More information at [www.portal.unesco.org](http://www.portal.unesco.org).

<sup>35</sup> See [www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org).

<sup>36</sup> See [www.ecen.org](http://www.ecen.org).

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Lemeni, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

of the human nature; it is time that the human nature in its turn restored the environment given to it to inhabit so that it can return it to God.

It is not an easy task to propose a Christian life style, modest, confined to the bare necessities, without extravagance, modelled on that of the Church Fathers. Nevertheless the concern for the preservation of the creation must constitute a permanent injunction to Christians to practise discipline and the spiritual renewal appropriate for a Christian life, regardless of one's social standing.

Devout Christians must see the world as their home and each person as their brother or sister whom Christ loves. Mass education of mankind in the spirit of responsibility for the creation is still treated superficially.<sup>38</sup> There are no methods and practices that can determine the transfer of knowledge to action. Economic systems promote development based on profit, disregarding the environment, while the political systems have other priorities than the fate of the planet, for which the whole of mankind is actually responsible. The change of attitude begins with the change of mentality by realising that one must "discard the faith in the autonomy of creation, typical of the secularised culture, and the antinomial statement of God's transcendence in relation to Creation and His immanence in creation".<sup>39</sup> The failure to take concrete steps is a warning on the relationship between science and theology and between social culture and Christian faith. The views of the Gospel, not only on the ecological crisis but on many other challenges of the modern world, as expressed by and through the Christ's Church, are often cast aside. Together with the reconsideration of the attitude towards matter, one must reevaluate the theology of the Holy Spirit on which the teaching about life is founded.

The education for man's dignity, unilaterally promoted in all the political, social, economic and theological circles, must be complemented by the education for life itself, as one cannot "talk of the history of man while ignoring the life of the cosmos".<sup>40</sup> One chief reason for concern should also be that the development of communication technologies has not produced an improved quality of human relations: there is much talking but little communication. The motivation to communicate is often economic and financial, which has an effect on the quality of human relations.

### **The ascetic model**

Ecology means not only care for one's home, but is also the object of practical theology. Orthodoxy has not made a radical distinction between academic theology and practical theology, the latter being experienced by the faithful in the parish and monastic communities. A regular day in the life of a faithful used to begin with the morning prayer, and included work in the field that provided the

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<sup>38</sup> Certain churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church in Italy, frequently organise meetings on ecological issues, while the National Service for Cultural Projects of the Catholic Church published a book, *Responsabilità per il Creato*, Elledici, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, *art. cit.* p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Idem, *art. cit.* p. 4.

livelihood, thanksgiving prayer for every meal and harvest received from God, family life and participation in the life of the parish community, and finally the prayer giving thanks for all of God's gifts of the past day and asking for peace for the night to follow.

Christianity advocates moderation in everything as it does not regard accumulation of goods as a vocation, as does the modern man. It seeks to preserve the boundary between nature as object of human exploitation and nature as an illusion, asserting that nature is the means by which man can gain access to the life eternal. The patristic teaching on the issue is clear-cut: nature is not a "thing": it is similar to] a being that cooperates with another nature, that is man.<sup>41</sup>

Asceticism represents the austere side of the care for the environment, in conjunction with the focusing of attention on God and the spiritual growth. Its message is simple: it is not man who should rule over the earth but God, a situation that would be greatly beneficial to man.

"The image of God" in man does not refer only to man's soul, but also to his body. Asceticism as an attitude towards matter has been practised ever since early Christianity, having a twofold significance: restraint from indulging into the desires of the body as the effects of dissipation, the strengthening of the will to reject individual desires, gladly accepting what is pleasing to God. A disciple's daily obedience of his spiritual father or of the abbot is an act of will focused on what the disciple does not want (unwillingness) but accepts for the sake of higher ideals. The aim of asceticism is to fortify the will, discipline the spirit and the body, dominate the passions and break with anything material, rejecting what is negative, in order to restore the human nature according to the edenic model.

Alongside abstention from things that are not spiritually beneficial, the ascetic intensifies the spiritual and liturgical practice, in a constant state of thanksgiving to the Lord for everything that He has given to the world. That is why the monk spends much of his time praying and contemplating. The moderation that he exercises is the normal state that Adam had to respect in the garden of Eden. This is the understanding of the statement that the monk bears the "angelic face".

Beyond the strengthening of the will and the practising of discipline, a monk's temperance is also a token of respect for the creation which he does not exploit excessively; he only takes what nature offers. It is not a case of abhorrence of anything material, but rather a different understanding of divine gifts. In many cases the ascetic achieves perfect harmony with the wilderness and the beasts, which seem to be responsive to his spiritual message. Drawing on reason and will, the ascetic makes the world serve spiritual ideals such as the control of passions and primitive desires related to property, reproduction and pride (I John 2: 16). What matters to the ascetic is not his own life, but his relationship with God and his neighbours for the sake of the eternal life and the constant state of thanksgiving to the Creator, which has caused certain theologians to refer to man as "homo eucharisticus" (a being capable of thanksgiving).

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<sup>41</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation...*, pp. 209 – 215.

The ascetic, therefore, forsakes the world dominated by man without hating it or his fellow human beings, realising that the true path is different. He follows the injunction of the prophet Joel: “Rend your heart and not your garments, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate [...] He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.” (Joel 2, 13 – 14) The Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios called this attitude the “ascetic spirit”, meaning a form of voluntary renunciation and greater simplicity of daily life.

The ecological crisis, provided it can be attenuated, can find relief in the ascetic model. It involves the will of man to limit consumption and possessions, not only food but any type of consumption that exhausts non-renewable resources. The genuine distinction between wanting and having is crucial, as it governs the relationship between selfish desires and natural necessities. The place of man in the universe can only be understood when he has the capacity to say ‘no’ to everything that defines sin.

### **The Eucharistic model**

#### **The Eucharistic model**

The Eucharistic model is represented in the theology of Bishop John of Pergamum and Metropolitan Kallistos Ware,<sup>42</sup> and presupposes the ascetic model. Approached from a Eucharistic perspective, the world was made to be received, given and shared. Through man, the world enters the Eucharistic relationship: God – priest – world. Psalm 148 is illuminating, as it reports the participation of creatures in the glorification of the Creator as a permanent Eucharist: “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.” (Psalm 148: 5 – 13) This description is a demonstration of a “natural contemplation”<sup>43</sup> that is gradually being lost in the practice of Christian life, as it refuses the idea of “communion” and commonness, in favour of individualism.

The Liturgy itself is a sort of pilgrimage towards God’s kingdom. Ever since Adam, humanity has understood that it is on a pilgrimage on earth. The fallen world, through the communion with thanksgiving, reveals its beauty. The saint is most able to perceive it, thanks to his purified soul. This was

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<sup>42</sup> Bishop John Zizioulas, *Creația ca Euharistie*, Ed. Bizantină, Bucharest, 1999 or Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *Tout ce que vit est saint*, traduction de l’anglais par Françoise Lhoest, Lucie et Maxime Egger, Thierry Verhelst, Marc Guichard, Bernand et Dominique Goublomme, Les Editions Cerf et Le sel de la terre, Paris/Pully, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Anestis G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001, p. 103]

noted by the anonymous Russian pilgrim from the 19<sup>th</sup> century who felt his heart filling up with infinite love for all the creation when, on his way through endless forests, he said the Prayer of the heart: “When I prayed in my heart, everything around me seemed delightful and marvelous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that they existed for man's sake, that they witnessed to the love of God for man, that all things prayed to God and sang his praise. I understood what is written in the Philokalia: to have knowledge of the language of the creation.”<sup>44</sup>

The Eucharist involves effort and renunciation. To avoid the loss of its spiritual dimension, the shared participation in the Liturgy requires that participants are educated in a spiritual, moral and ecological sense about nature, the monastic and ecclesial communities, their internal organisation, the attitude towards historical monuments and natural sites, the matter that is to be sanctified and given as a gift. Through the Liturgy, the meeting with other people, worshipping, listening to the Word of God create a sense of the sacredness of matter. The education for the Eucharist can be an effective alternative for the temptations of the modern world marked by violence, neglect of the community and hedonism.

### **The solidarity model**

As already shown, theology translates divine principles into actions of the Church, which is called to apply in society and preach liberation: to the poor, liberation from concerns and destitution and to the rich, liberation from greed. Salvation itself is a liberation. According to the Holy Apostle Paul Christ liberates the whole universe,<sup>45</sup> transforms matter and renews the earth.<sup>46</sup> This ideal is embodied within the life of the parish and monastic community which best fit the idea of sustainable development. They are organised according to religious, moral and canonical criteria withdrawn from the Bible. Such communities believe that the rightful owner of the land is God, that land must be consecrated and cultivated, that one must give thanks for everything and use it according to rules and necessities (the guiding principle is the suppression of the will) and share with the needy out of brotherly love. Monastics do not work in order to amass riches but to give to the poor, they respect God's authority over nature, and the organisation, processing and construction of their dwellings are in harmony with nature. From the

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<sup>44</sup> *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated by R. M. French, London, SPCK, 1954, pp. 31-32.

<sup>45</sup> “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who hve the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Romans 8: 19 - 23)

<sup>46</sup> “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”(Ephesians 1: 7 - 10).

earliest days, those who have established monastic communities have made sure that they do not affect the environment and misuse the available resources.

### **As a conclusion**

The well-known exterior fresco at Voroneț Monastery illustrates various examples of nature's apparent union with the human existence. The most important one is the Saviour's genealogy, also known as the Joshua tree, in which every person in the history of mankind's salvation is represented in a cup-shaped flower. In fact, the Church is an image of the cosmic creation, an idea developed by St. Maxim the Confessor as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>47</sup> The images from Bucovina promote the interpretation of nature as being in close communion with the human nature, from the moment of creation until the Final Judgment that all will attend, be they plants, animals or people. The world has a beginning and must have an end, but its end must not be forced, determined prematurely, against God's will. According to St. John Chrysostomos, nothing in the world is evil except sin, because of which nature suffers and incurs God's punishment. That is why, he wrote, "God is good and loves all people not only when He pours out His blessings but also when he punishes. For His punishments are blessings and show His care for mankind. So when you see famine, plague, draught, flooding and storms in the heaven or anything else that punishes the human nature, do not despair, do not lose hope, but pray to the One who works and glorify His power. For all these happen so that your soul may be more wise!" In other words, man alone can determine neither the end nor the salvation of the planet, but can return to God, acknowledge His rationality, goodness and love for people and seek to follow His will and plan on behalf of the creation, respecting his own dignity as priest, servant and king of creation.

In parallel with the political and social decisions of the European bodies, the Church plays an important role in the education for the preservation and transfiguration of matter, as it has done throughout its age-old tradition. The notion of symphony from the Byzantine tradition must not be limited to Church – State relations, but must extend to cover the Church – universe relation.

The Church, as a divine-human institution, is called to fully take on its formative and educational role. Thus, prophetically, it must voice the realities of faith and proclaim the divine message as the instrument that forms one's opinion about creation, also showing its destiny. From an educational point of view, the Church must teach the faithful to apply in their daily lives the care for what has been given to them as a gift, showing concern for the future generations who are equally entitled to a healthy life. In terms of communication, the Church is called to link the school, the family, the parish, the non-governmental organisations and foundations and generally people who share particular interests. It must expand the model of education for moderation, specific to Orthodoxy, which experiences fasting as a

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<sup>47</sup> *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 657-717, apud Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 sq.

method to strengthen the will of the person, to care for the soul and limit consumption in favour of generosity and communion.

In the dialogue with other Christian denominations, Orthodoxy can propose the integration of cosmology in the liturgical space of the life of all Christians who have lost this dimension. The new European context can be used to provide assistance to monastic communities to practise sustainable agriculture and produce organic food. Education through pilgrimage can also be promoted, by changing the mentality of tourists towards greater care for the religious and natural sites and towards cultivating the observance and importance of the Eucharist in the daily life.

Religious education is called to accommodate among its classical themes the newer aspects of the theology of creation, not only the origin of life from God, but also man's responsibility for the created world, on the way towards transformation.<sup>48</sup> It's not the apocalyptic panic that is the hallmark of true faith, for the ages are in the hands of God, but the effort to become responsible Eucharistic creatures.

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<sup>48</sup> The works of Adrian Lemeni and Rev. Doru Costache are useful and can provide a basis for the act of reevaluating the meaning and the destiny of the created world in dialogue with science. An exhaustive bibliography is available at [www.geocities.com/ccistd/bibliographyro](http://www.geocities.com/ccistd/bibliographyro).

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