

STANISŁAW RABIEJ

Uniwersytet Opolski, Wydział Teologiczny

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3677-2128>

Ecotheology in the service of religion and science

Abstract

The aim of the text is to assess the ecumenical potential of various contemporary approaches to ecotheology, which try to take into account the achievements of natural and social sciences. It outlines the effects of the ecumenical interest of the Churches in ecology, understood as a certain style of thinking and acting, taking into account the good of the natural environment. The results of ecological interest in the Churches are discussed by numerous authors. For example, two complementary concepts from Western and Eastern Christianity are presented: Thomas Berry's Interdisciplinary Ecotheology and John Zizioulas' Ethically Oriented Ecotheology.

Keywords: ecotheology, evolutionary biology, ethics, social anthropology.

Ekoteologia w służbie religii i nauki

Abstrakt

Celem tekstu jest ocena potencjału ekumenicznego różnych współczesnych ujęć ekoteologii, które próbują uwzględnić osiągnięcia nauk przyrodniczych i społecznych. Zarysowano efekty ekumenicznego zainteresowania Kościołów ekologią, rozumianą jako pewien styl myślenia i działania, uwzględniający dobro środowiska naturalnego. Dla przykładu przedstawiono dwie komplementarne koncepcje pochodzące ze środowiska zachodniego i wschodniego chrześcijaństwa: interdyscyplinarna ekoteologia Thomasa Berry'ego oraz etycznie zorientowana ekoteologia wg Johna Zizioulasa.

Słowa kluczowe: ekoteologia, biologia ewolucyjna, etyka, antropologia społeczna.

The contemporary growing interest in the environment, seen as a shift towards ecology, also takes the form of religiously motivated care for the environment. Therefore, over the last few decades, a development of religious ecology has been observed. This trend is trying to join the debate focused on threats to the natural environment which is considered to be a common home. A striking example of this process is the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* dedicated to caring for the common home. This religious

document by the Bishop of Rome was described by the media as a “Green Encyclical”. It reminds us that the views of St. Francis of Assisi from over 800 years ago are highly relevant nowadays. The destruction of the natural environment has to be seen as an attack on the work of the Creator. This includes not only spoiling the climate, but also the loss of biodiversity, the construction of giant dams and many other economic ventures. The encyclical reminds Christians that they must take care not only for themselves and others, but also for all the works of the Creator. The Pope appeals more for efficiency of actions than ensuring oneself a clear conscience¹.

In a well-known survey titled *A Greener Faith*, Roger Gottlieb tracked the rise of religious environmentalism (concern for the environment) in various religions and traditions, including Christianity. Its purpose was to examine the various possible religious responses to ecology, rather than to analyze their validity from within a specific religious-denominational tradition².

The purpose of this text is to assess the ecumenical potential of various contemporary approaches to ecotheology, which try to take into account the achievements of natural and social sciences. There is a growing need to create a shared ecotheology that requires a strong focus on science and faith, and an understanding of the relationship between them. It seems reasonable to conclude: “If science itself did not motivate the expected environmental change that would be necessary to have a significant impact on the ecological crisis, and if Western Christianity bears a clear responsibility for this moment of crisis, then science and faith need each other”³.

The threat of an ecological catastrophe unites people of different faiths and worldviews. This study will be an attempt to justify the extent to which ecotheology created in ecumenical openness can help formulate a response to the contemporary ecological crisis. This task is possible to perform connecting ecumenical arrangements in this area with the achievements of such disciplines as: cosmology, evolutionary biology, ethics, social anthropology and cultural studies.

Among the existing attempts of such extensive research, it is worth taking into account the significant publications resulting from previous research in this field. Numerous authors discuss the effects of the ecumenical interest of the Churches in ecology, understood as a certain style of thinking and acting, taking into account the good of the natural environment⁴.

¹ Pope Francis. 2015. *Laudato si'*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice [*Laudato si'*. *Litt. enc. S.P. De communi domo colenda*. 2015. Acta Apostolicae Sedis 107 : 847–944.]

² Roger Gottlieb. 2006. *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, A.J. Swoboda. 2014. *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis*. Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 7.

⁴ Przemysław Kantyka. 2019. *Ekologia w teologiczno-społecznej refleksji ekumenicznej. Wybrane ujęcia*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL; Michał Wyrostkiewicz. 2019. *Osoba i środowisko. Studia teologiczno-ekologiczne*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.

1. Reasons for the rise of ecotheology

The theological discourse focusing on the interrelationship between religion and nature, especially in the light of environmental problems, gained importance at the end of the 20th century, mainly in Christian circles. The era of ecotheology did not develop fully until the 1960^s. It was first publicly announced by the Protestant ecotheologist Joseph Sittler⁵. Inspired by the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, Sittler called for a new theology of grace (charitology) that would include, not exclude, nature⁶. Sittler was the first to give the term “ecotheology” a public meaning as a theological construct, and took the initiative to engage in discussions with ecotheologists such as Aldo Leopold and ecologically sensitive Christian poets⁷. One of them was Gerard Manly Hopkins⁸.

In the further development, the validation of ecotheology among theological sciences occurred for at least two reasons. The first was the need to respond to the common belief that the enormous size of the ecological crisis threatens the future of human life both on earth and in eternity. The second was the need to formulate a response to the so-called “ecological complaint” against Christianity, which was often perceived as an “inspiration” for the negative exploitation of the environment, motivated by the biblical exhortation: “Make the earth subdued” (Gen 1,28).

As it developed, ecotheology has become a form of constructive theology that generally assumes that there is a connection between human religious/spiritual worldviews and the degradation of nature. It explores the interactions between ecological values such as sustainable development and human domination in nature. This movement resulted in numerous religious and environmental projects around the world⁹.

The growing awareness of the ecological crisis has led to widespread religious reflection on the relationship between man and nature. Reflection of this kind in most religious traditions, referring to ethics and cosmology, can be seen as part of the already known theology of nature. Christian ecotheology draws from the writings of such authors as the Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre

⁵ Joseph Sittler. 1959. *The Ecology of Faith*. Yale: Lyman Beecher Lectures; Joseph Sittler. 2000. *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

⁶ David G. Horrell. 2001. “From *ἀδελφοί* to *οἶκος θεοῦ*: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity”. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2): 296–299.

⁷ Richard L. Knight, Susanne Riedel. 2002. *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Gerard Manly Hopkins. 2009. *The Poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins*. Urbana-Champaign, IL: Book Jungle.

⁹ Panu Pihkala. 2017. *Early Ecotheology and Joseph Sittler*. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Teilhard de Chardin¹⁰ and the process theologian Alfred North Whitehead¹¹. In Protestantism, it is well represented by Jan B. Cobb¹² and Jürgen Moltmann¹³, and the ecofeminist theologians Rosemary Radford Ruether, Catherine Keller and Sallie McFague, Melanie Harris and Karen Baker-Fletcher¹⁴. Creation theology as another important branch of ecotheology was developed and popularized by Matthew Fox¹⁵. Among liberation theologians, ecological texts by Leonardo Boff¹⁶ and George Tinker¹⁷ deserve great attention. In Roman Catholicism, John F. Haught¹⁸, Thomas Berry¹⁹ and Pope Francis definitely stand out in this respect. In Orthodoxy, Elizabeth Theokritoff²⁰, George Nalunnakkal²¹ and John Zizioulas are worth mentioning²². The attempts of ecological translation of the Bible, proposed, among others by Ellen Davis also play an important role²³.

Abraham Joshua Heschel²⁴ and Martin Buber²⁵, as Jewish theologians, left their mark on Christian ecology and were a significant inspiration for

¹⁰ David Grumett. 2005. *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity, and Cosmos*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers.

¹¹ Alfred North Whitehead. 1978. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. New York: Free Press; Donald W. Sherburne. 1981, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹² John B. Cobb. 2000. *God and the World*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

¹³ Celia E. Deane-Drummond. 2016. *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

¹⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether. 2005. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁵ Rupert Sheldrake, Matthew Fox. 2019. *O naturze, duchu i materii*. Transl. Ewa K. Suskiewicz. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Virgo.

¹⁶ Leonardo Boff. 1997. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Transl. Phillip Berryman. New York: Orbis Books.

¹⁷ George E. Tinker. 2008. *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty*. New York: Orbis Books.

¹⁸ John F. Haught. 2019. *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁹ Thomas Berry: *The Dream of the Earth* (1988); *Befriending the Earth* (1991); *The Universe Story From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era. A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (1992); *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (1999); *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (2006); *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (2009).

²⁰ Elizabeth Theokritoff. 2009. *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

²¹ George Nalunnakkal. 2004. *Green Liberation Towards an integral ecotheology*. Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

²² John Zizioulas. 1989. "Preserving God's Creation. Lecture First". *King's Theological Review* 12: 41–45.

²³ Ellen F. Davis. 2009. *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁴ Harold Kasimow, Byron L. Sherwin. 2005. *Żadna religia nie jest samotną wyspą: Abraham Joshua Heschel i dialog międzyreligijny*. Transl. Marta Kapera. Kraków: WAM.

²⁵ Kenneth Kramer, Mechthild Gawlick. 2003. *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue*. New Jersey: Paulist Press.

Jewish ecology. An interesting expression of Jewish ecology can also be found in the works of David Mevoror Seidenberg, who writes on Kabbalah and ecology²⁶.

Indian ecology is also known, represented among others by Vandana Shiva²⁷. By contrast, Seyyed Hossein Nasr²⁸, a liberal Muslim theologian and Persian Sufi philosopher, is one of the first in this circle to call for a revision of the so-called Western relationship to nature²⁹.

As an evolutionary biologist, Elisabeth Sahtouris promotes the vision that care for the environment will result in the health and well-being of mankind in the larger systems of life on earth and in space³⁰. Being a promoter of Gaia theory and a collaborator of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, she finds connections between Gaianism, ecology, and major world religions³¹. On the other hand, John Collier, writing about the Indians of the Americas, looks for a relationship between ecology and religion among the indigenous people of North and South America³².

The significant development of ecotheology also resulted from theology's interest in the contemporary ecological crisis, which has become an intense topic of discussion in the academic community. A significant impetus was the 1967 article *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* by Lynn White, professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles³³. The author justifies the thesis that the Christian model of human domination over nature led to the devastation of the environment. In 1973, another theologian, Jack Rogers, published a text that systematizes the research of about twelve theologians who have appeared since White's article³⁴. It reflects the search for an "appropriate theological model" that will properly evaluate the biblical data on all relations between God,

²⁶ David Mevoror Seidenberg. 2015. *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁷ Vandana Shiva. 1998. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. New Delhi: Zed Books.

²⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr. 1996. *Religion and the Order of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Soumaya Pernilla Ouis. 1998. "Islamic Ecotheology based on the Qur'an". *Islamic Studies* 37 (2): 151–181.

³⁰ Elisabeth Sahtouris. 2000. *Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution*. Bloomington: iUniverse; Elisabeth Sahtouris. 2018. *Gaia's Dance: The Story of Earth & Us*. Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

³¹ Daniel Belgrad. 2019. *The Culture of Feedback: Ecological Thinking in Seventies America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³² John Collier. 1995. *Patterns and Ceremonials of the Indians of the Southwest*. New York: Dover Publications.

³³ Lynn White. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis". *Science* 155: 1203–1207.

³⁴ Jack Rogers. 1973. *Ecological Theology: The Search for an Appropriate Theological Model*. Kampen: Kok. 180–202.

people and nature. New trends in modern theological sciences have begun to pay attention to both the biological and spiritual spheres. The need for science and religion complementation lies behind this.

2. Complementarity of religion and science

There are fears in the ongoing debate and the actions that follow from it that science and education per se are unable to make the necessary changes in individual and social pro-ecological attitudes. The fact that political institutions are ineffective in averting progressive environmental damage suggests that addressing the human activity in this domain on a global scale requires a sufficiently strong influence. In this area, it seems necessary to refer to religious beliefs in order to be able to conceptualize them on a cosmic scale. Several initiatives have emerged in this direction to find solutions to the existing environmental problems. In 1996, The “Economist” reported that the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) had identified over 120,000 religious environmental projects worldwide³⁵. Some of them are of special importance.

One of these significant projects dates back to 1995, when Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, initiated a series of meetings entitled: “Religion, Science and Environment”. In such meetings, scientists and religious leaders were brought together in order to solve environmental problems in regions where most Orthodox Christians live. One of the strongest doctrinal statements ever made by a world religious leader was announced in the course of this project. In 1997, the Ecumenical Patriarch, speaking in Santa Barbara, stated: “It is a sin that man causes extinction of species and destroys the biological diversity of God’s creation; that man is degrading the Earth’s integrity by changing its climate, depriving it of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; hurts other people with diseases; that man pollutes the water, earth, air and life with poisonous substances; these are sins”³⁶. Less than twenty years later, the Bishop of Rome – Pope Francis – admonished his fellow believers in the same way, introducing the categories of “ecological sin”³⁷. “Crimes against the natural environment”, sins against the common home would be morally penalized. Such a proposal also appeared in 2019 during the synod of bishops on the Ama-

³⁵ Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). *ARC-UN: Faiths’ Long Term Commitments for a Living Planet*. (21.07.2020) <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID>.

³⁶ John Chryssavgis. 2007. “Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: insights into an Orthodox Christian worldview”. *The International Journal of Environmental Studies* 64 (1): 9–18.

³⁷ <https://noizz.pl/spoleczenstwo/papiez-franciszek-chce-wprowadzic-grzech-ekologiczny/> (18.11.2019).

zon. Francis expressed the opinion that crimes against nature are “crimes against peace”. He called on lawyers to take steps to introduce “legal protection of our common home”³⁸.

A similar call for global responsibility for ecology was made by Patriarch Bartholomew I in 2009, when he closed the deliberations in New Orleans. He recalled that “facing climate change cannot be seen as a burden, but as an opportunity to create a healthier planet”. The originator of the symposia held since 1995 added that such an attitude will ensure for future generations to be able to benefit from the riches of our globe. During the meeting, attention was paid, inter alia, to the dramatic effects of climate change, for example for cities located close to water reservoirs. Manila, New York, London and New Orleans were indicated as particularly threatened large urban centers. It was emphasized that the number of natural disasters caused by the rising level of the seas and oceans has increased significantly in recent years. The participants of the symposium on the Mississippi also called for closer cooperation to spread global environmental responsibility.

Another notable initiative since 1996 was a series of ten conferences on religion and ecology, organized by Mary Evelyn Tucker and her husband John Grim at the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. These scientific meetings, important for ecotheology, gathered researchers of Hinduism, indigenous peoples’ spirituality, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism. In such a cluster of many religious traditions, the question arose: will a spiritual change in attitude towards nature result in the emergence of one “environmentally correct” religious practice? Very few of the participants in these meetings gave an affirmative answer to this question. The comments often suggested that, despite religious pluralism, there is a constant line of development for communities that tend to refer to authoritative figures or inspired texts, rather than opt for radical change under the influence of new challenges³⁹. Both the Christians of the East and the West can refer to an early ascetic tradition going back to the beginning of the 5th century. Refocusing on this tradition can foster more ecologically responsible attitudes. There we find doctrinal threads supporting environmental values, with special attention being paid to replacing the rhetoric of human domination over creation from the Book of Genesis with the equally biblical language of responsible management of creation by human⁴⁰.

³⁸ <https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/watykan/news/2019-10/synod-biskupow-domument-koncowy.html>
(21.12.2019).

³⁹ Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Willis Jenkins. 2017. *Routledge Handbook on Religion and Ecology*. New York: Routledge Books.

⁴⁰ Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim. 2016. *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe*. New York: Orbis Books.

Persistent continuation of this research led to organizing Conference entitled “Religion, Ecology and Our Planetary Future” in 2016, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the series of the Conferences “World Religions and Ecology” at Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. During the deliberations, new challenges for understanding and transforming the discourse of religion and ecology in the 21st century were discussed. It is clear that scientific research plays a key role, while the socio-political realities require a responsible and mature commitment, a qualified negotiator, a good citizen, and sometimes a brave prophet. On the other hand, the deep truths and values of religious traditions also require more learning and considering achievements of many teachings. To be effective in these pro-environmental efforts, many valuable conclusions must be revised, nuanced and deepened by the truths spoken in all the languages of the world’s religions. An environmental concern that would ignore or patronize the billions of religious believers on earth is not very effective itself.

The final conclusion of the conference invited people to work together taking into account the energies and ideals of religious communities around the world. It is essential to know great and small, old and new traditions, their basic beliefs and practices, their understanding of divinity, man and the cosmos. Even the seemingly most familiar traditions, such as the Christian ones, are often known to a small extent and superficially.

The creators of the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions (Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology since 2006) largely continue the ecotheological intuitions of their master Thomas Berry, who made a significant contribution to the development of interdisciplinary ecotheological thought. To celebrate his 100th birthday, in 2014, the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology organized a conference at Yale University entitled “Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe”⁴¹.

3. Interdisciplinary ecotheology by Thomas Berry

The concept of Thomas Berry (1914–2009) is an example of ecotheology practiced in ecumenical discourse which takes into account the achievements of natural sciences. This historian of culture and researcher of world religions, especially Asian traditions, called himself a “geologist”. He rejected the label of “theologian” or “ecologist” as being too narrow and not describing his cultural studies in the history of religion. He reacted early to the growing ecological and

⁴¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Andrew Angyal. 2019. *Thomas Berry. A Biography*. New York: Columbia University Press.

climate crisis. In 1978, he indicated the need for creating a “new history” of evolution⁴². He suggested that a deep understanding of the history and evolving universe functioning is a necessary inspiration and guide for the effective functioning of both the individual and the species. He believed that humanity, after an era of thoughtless exploitation of the planet’s resources, was ready to assume a new role. Its essence would be to understand oneself as part of a larger, interdependent earthly community, consisting a community of subjects, and not a set of objects. He argued people to be at a critical turning point, marked by the transition from the “Cenozoic Era” to a new phase of evolution that would become either an “Eco-Era” characterized by a stronger human-earth relationship, or a “Technozoic Era” in which man would dominate and exploit the planet through technological expansion. He also announced that the transformation of humanity’s priorities would not be easy. This “great work” will be accomplished in several institutional spheres: in the political and legal order, economic and industrial life, education and religion⁴³.

Thomas Berry is an outstanding example of interdisciplinary researcher in the field of religious studies, cultural studies, and ecology. He understood the ecological crisis as a sign of the contemporary cultural crisis. He associated the intensity of instrumentalisation of nature by Western civilization with the disintegration of the unifying role of history that was lived by the former generations of Christians. That history was a fusion of biblical history with Greek cosmology. This alliance existed until the early Middle Ages and gradually disintegrated in the 11th century and the subsequent epoch of the scientific revolution. While this amalgam had its flaws and distortions, it was the functional basis of life. It was a cosmological story in which the nature of the universe was constitutive of society. Cosmology, in Berry’s opinion, must become a functional part of human history again. Modern scientific cosmology provides the basis for a story in which the evolution of the physical universe can be viewed as the history of nature. The history of the universe could be an attempt to create a history that would place the human species in integral relation to the rest of nature. In his religious interpretation of the universe evolution as a mediation of divine activity, Barry sought to find a place for spirituality and praxis in relation to nature⁴⁴.

Interdisciplinary functional cosmology by Th. Berry points out that the ecological crisis should be seen as a moral problem that also belongs to Christianity

⁴² Thomas Berry. 1978. “The New Story. Comments on the Origin, Identification, and Transmission of Values”. *Teilhard Studies* (1): 77–88.

⁴³ Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme. 1994. *The Universe Story From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era, A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*. New York: Harper Collins.

⁴⁴ Thomas Berry, Evelyn Tucker. 2009. *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Columbia University Press.

and other religions. Appropriate anthropology seeking self-understanding of man and shaping one's relationship to creation can be a truly authentic response to the ecological crisis. This affects the relationship between man and the universe that serves the promotion of planetary prosperity. In Berry's works, there are many references to both Judeo-Christian writings, as well as Chinese and Indian sacred texts and contemporary scientific theories. This author identified with the counter-cultural attitude of some of these traditions and saw all of them as potential sources of alternative ideas to the hegemonic culture of the West. Methodologically his concept can be defined as descriptive and performative rhetoric, purposely focused on the ecological crisis. Overall, as an interdisciplinary researcher, he was involved in explaining the task of theology, which, by undertaking the description of a new spiritual experience in the natural world, developed thanks to the achievements of modern science.

4. The ethical aspect of ecotheology according to John Zizioulas

The concept of one of the most influential contemporary Orthodox theologians is an example of an ecumenically open ecotheology practiced in Orthodoxy. John Zizioulas – titular metropolitan bishop of Pergamon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople⁴⁵. His interdisciplinary theological works focus particularly on two areas: theological ontology and ethics. Zizioulas' theology reflects the influence of Russian émigré theologians such as Nikolay Afanasiev, Vladimir Loski and Georges Florowski. The ascetic theology of Archimandrite Sophrona (Sakharov), the founder of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, England, had a big impact as well. In 2006–2007 he was a member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He was also elected co-chair of the International Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches⁴⁶.

In the field of theological ontology, Zizioulas worked on the theology of the person, referring to the works of St. Irenaeus and St. Maxim the Confessor. The main goal of his work was to promote his own ontology of personality, derived from extensive studies of Greek philosophy, the writings of the patristic era, and contemporary rationalist philosophy. He claims that only a person who is able to participate (Greek *koinonia*) in God's Trinitarian life can achieve full humanity. An essential component of the personality ontology is the freedom to self-affirm

⁴⁵ Rowan Williams. 2005. Eastern Orthodox Theology. In *The Modern Theologians*. Ed. David F. Ford, 572–588. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁴⁶ Nicholas V. Sakharov. 2002. *I Love, Therefore I Am: The Theological Legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 235.

and participate in a relationship. He emphasizes that man exists initially as a biological hypostasis, limited in the kinds of possible biological relationships until the ultimate end of that type of existence, which is death⁴⁷.

Using existentialist philosophers and novelists, especially the French writer Albert Camus, he tries to show that the only kind of ontological freedom in biological hypostasis is the choice to commit suicide. He claims that sacramental baptism constitutes an ontological change in man, making him or her an ecclesial hypostasis or a person. This revival “from above” gives a new ontological freedom that is no longer restricted by the limits of biological existence. The ecclesial essence understood in this way is eschatological, which means paradoxical: it exists “now”, but “not yet”. The end of this rebirth “from above” is the day of resurrection, when this body will no longer be subject to death⁴⁸.

In the light of this theological ontology, Zizioulas outlines the mission and life of the Church and religious communities. It should be a testimony to the communion of man with the rest of creation. Anyone can take on the task of being a “priest of creation”. Zizioulas’ call for changing cultural consciousness is ultimately expressed in promoting what he describes as “ecological asceticism” that underpins ethical protology⁴⁹.

According to Zizioulas, anthropocentrism – the philosophical trend that elevates man above the material world – contributed to the ecological crisis. In his theology of creation (protology), he emphasizes that our culture needs the rebirth of consciousness, liberating man from egocentrism. John Zizioulas’ ecotheological thought can be summed up with the following conclusions:

- present ecological crisis grows out of religiously motivated anthropocentrism;
- a dualistic worldview becomes apparent in the cultural consciousness;
- the crisis of culture is also the loss of nature’s sanctity;
- communion with “other” (God, people and creation) is essential;
- in this area, Man appears as the Priest of Creation.

⁴⁷ John Zizioulas. 2012. *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World*. California: Sebastian Press.

⁴⁸ John Zizioulas. 2012. *Remembering the Future: An Eschatological Ontology*. New York: T&T Clark.

⁴⁹ John Zizioulas. 2006. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. New York: T&T Clark.

Conclusion

Both the previously discussed ecumenical initiatives for ecotheology and the interdisciplinary research of Thomas Berry and John Zizioulas can be summarized in the following conclusions:

- the current ecological crisis is the number one problem the global human community is facing;
- both the scientific and research potential of academic circles as well as the good will of religious and ecclesial communities must be involved in solving this problem;
- with regard to ecclesial communities, it is postulated to develop a common, ecumenically agreed ecotheology;
- ecumenically oriented ecotheology should be rooted in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the latest research in the field of biology, anthropology, philosophy and cosmology;
- the sanctity of creation, the ecological responsibility of the human, the relationship between ecological health and social justice encourage the promotion of both human dignity, ecological integrity and ethical responsibility;
- a call for changing cultural awareness is observed;
- a new ethos on nature is needed;
- a different attitude and mentality is necessary more than a program;
- not legislation but culture can help;
- the cultural creativity of religious communities is expected.

The application of the above postulates in practice may result in a kind of “eco-reformation” within ecclesial and religious communities.

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