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## Ecumenical animal studies

### Abstract

The presented text is located at the intersection of theology and philosophy with a particular focus on the study of human-animal relations in scientific terms (human animal studies). The author refers to a new research sub-discipline that deals with the place of animals in the Christian history of salvation. The premise of the research is to organize the conceptual apparatus and critically reflect on the validity of the use of the terms ecotheology/animal theology and justify their ecumenical meaning. In his research, the author takes a polycentric view of the world (bio – zoo – anthropo –) recognizing that all living beings have intrinsic value and are valuable in themselves, while man is one of many equal elements of the created world. The purpose of the analyses is to determine the place of animals in Christian ecumenical theology. A comparative methodology was applied in capturing the ecotheological reflection of basic Christian denominations (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism). An objective and reliable reflection on the attitude of these faiths to the world of animals was assumed, especially in view of the constantly recurring thought antagonizing these faiths. The subject matter of the study is part of the considerations in the field of ecotheology, which are carried out mainly by Western scholars in relation to Catholic and Protestant theology, less frequently in the East.

**Keywords:** ecotheology, animal theology, ecumenism, human animal studies.

## Ekumeniczna teologia zwierząt

### Abstrakt

Prezentowany tekst sytuuje się wśród interdyscyplinarnych badań w obszarze teologii i filozofii, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem relacji człowiek – zwierzę (*human animal studies*). Autor odwołuje się do nowej subdyscypliny badawczej, która zajmuje się miejscem zwierząt w chrześcijańskiej historii zbawienia. Założeniem badań jest uporządkowanie aparatu pojęciowego i krytyczna refleksja nad zasadnością stosowania terminów ekoteologia/teologia zwierząt oraz uzasadnienie ich ekumenicznego znaczenia. W swoich badaniach autor przyjmuje policentryczne spojrzenie na świat (bio – zoo – anthropo –), uznając, że wszystkie istoty żywe posiadają wewnętrzną wartość i są cenne same w sobie, natomiast człowiek jest jednym z wielu równoprawnych elementów świata stworzonego. Celem analiz jest określenie miejsca zwierząt w chrześcijańskiej teologii ekumenicznej. Zastosowano metodologię porównawczą w uchwyceniu refleksji ekoteologicznej wśród podstawowych wyznań chrześcijańskich (katolicyzm, prawosławie, protestantyzm). Założono obiektywną

i rzetelną refleksję nad stosunkiem tych wyznań do świata zwierząt, zwłaszcza wobec stale powracającej myśli antagonizującej te wyznania. Tematyka opracowania wpisuje się w rozważania z zakresu ekoteologii, które prowadzone są głównie przez zachodnich uczonych w odniesieniu do teologii katolickiej i protestanckiej, rzadziej na Wschodzie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ekoteologia, teologia zwierząt, ekumenizm, *human animal studies*.

If a theologian is engaged in the study of human – animal relations within the framework of so-called human animal studies, he cannot overlook the achievements of the new research sub-discipline of ecotheology, which includes the study of the place of animals in Christian salvation history. Therefore, we will begin by recalling the milestones (authors and their works) contributing to the development of research within ecotheology and, consequently, animal theology. What is needed is a critical reflection on the validity of using both terms in an ecumenically oriented theology. In leaning toward a polycentric conception of the created world, we assume that all living beings have intrinsic value and are valuable in their own right. Man, on the other hand, is one of many equal elements of the created world. In such a perspective, it seems important to define the place of animals in Christian ecumenical theology. Using comparative methodology, it was necessary to recall the existing interpretation of the biblical descriptions of the creation of the bio – zoo – anthropo – world. The author also dared to offer his point of view.

## 1. From ecotheology to animal theology

In ecumenically oriented theological sciences, we have seen a significant development of ecotheology. Arguably, it stems from the widespread interest in the contemporary ecological crisis. A fairly distant impetus for this research was an article by Lynn White Jr. published in 1967, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. The author shows how the Christian model of man's dominion over nature has led to the devastation of the environment. This landmark text essentially launched the academic study of religion and nature. White argues that religions – particularly Western Christianity – are the root cause of the world's environmental crises. He goes on to argue that if this process is to be halted, let alone reverse anthropogenic environmental damage, we must radically transform religious cosmologies. White's extremely influential thesis has been cited thousands of times in various disciplines, including religious studies, environmental ethics, history, environmental science, philosophy, psychology and anthropology, among others. In practice, however, the environmental crisis has deepened in the decades since the article was published. Many original

essays have been published on the subject by leading scholars from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds, including religion and nature, environmental ethics, animal studies, ecofeminism, restoration ecology and ecotheology. Analysing the validity of White's arguments, constructive criticism of them was offered. New proposals also emerged as part of the ever-expanding scientific debate on how religion and culture contribute to both environmental crises and their possible solutions.

Subsequently, in 1973 Jack Rogers published a text systematizing the research of around a dozen theologians that had appeared since White's article was published.<sup>1</sup> They reflect the search for an "appropriate theological model" that will properly evaluate the biblical data on all relationships between God, humans and nature. Consistently, after fifty years, another study has appeared summarizing the theological discussion around the ecological crisis. Authors Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson published a collection of texts entitled: *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The "Lynn White Thesis" at Fifty*. As another reflection on the legacy and ongoing challenge of White's influential article, the book addresses a wide range of topics related to White's thesis, examining its relevance to environmental ethics and philosophy, the reaction of conservative Christians and evangelicals, its resonance with Asian religious traditions, ecofeminist interpretations of the article, and pointing out areas that have been overlooked in these analyses.<sup>2</sup>

The theological discourse focusing on the interconnectedness of religion and nature, especially in light of environmental concerns, gained prominence in the late 20th century, mainly in Christian circles. The era of ecotheology did not fully develop until the 1960s. It was first publicly proclaimed by Protestant ecotheologist Joseph Sittler.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, Sittler called for a new theology of grace (charitology) that included, rather than excluded, nature. Sittler was the first to give the term "ecotheology" a broad meaning as a theological construct. He took the initiative to establish a dialogue with ecotheologists such as Aldo Leopold and Christian poets with a strong ecological sensibility, one of whom was Gerard Manly Hopkins.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis". *Science* (155): 1203–1207; Jack Rogers. 1973. *Ecological Theology. The Search for an Appropriate Theological Model*. Kampen: Kok, 180–202.

<sup>2</sup> Todd LeVasseur. Anna Peterson. Eds. 2018. *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The "Lynn White Thesis" at Fifty*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Sittler. 1959. *The Ecology of Faith*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; Steven Bouma-Prediger, Peter Bakken. Eds. 2000. *Evocations of Grace. The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids (MI) – Cambridge.

<sup>4</sup> Richard L. Knight, Susanne Riedel. 2002. *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Gerard Manly Hopkins. 2008. *The Poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins*. Oxford: University Press; Panu Pihkala. 2017. *Early Ecotheology and Joseph Sittler*. Münster: LIT Verlag.

In further development, the legitimization of ecotheology among the theological sciences came about for at least two reasons. The first was the need to respond to the widespread conviction that the ecological crisis, in its enormous proportions, threatens the future of human life both on earth and in eternity. The second became the need to formulate a response to the so-called ecological complaint against Christianity, which was often seen as an “inspirer” of negative exploitation of the environment, motivated by the biblical call: “Make the earth subject to yourselves” (Genesis 1:28).

As it has developed, ecotheology has become a form of constructive theology, which generally assumes that there is a connection between human religious/spiritual worldviews and the degradation of nature. It explores the interaction between ecological values, such as sustainability, and the human domination of nature. This movement has resulted in numerous religious and environmental projects around the world. Growing awareness of the environmental crisis has led to widespread religious reflection on man’s relationship with nature. Reflection of this kind in most religious traditions referring to ethics and cosmology can be seen as a component of the already well-known theology of nature. In its origins, Christian ecotheology drew inspiration from the writings of such authors as Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and process theologian Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>5</sup> In Protestantism it is well represented by John B. Cobb and Jürgen Moltmann<sup>6</sup> and ecofeminist theologians Rosemary Radford Ruether, Catherine Keller and Sallie McFague, Melanie Harris and Karen Baker-Fletcher.<sup>7</sup> Creation theology as another important branch of ecotheology was developed and popularized by Matthew Fox.<sup>8</sup> Among liberation theologians, ecological texts by Leonard Boff and George Tinker are noteworthy.<sup>9</sup> In Roman Catholicism, John F. Haught, Thomas Berry<sup>10</sup>, or Pope

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred North Whitehead. 1978. *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*. New York: Free Press; D.W. Sherburne. 1981. *A Key to Whitehead’s Process and Reality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; David Grumett. 2005. *Teilhard de Chardin. Theology, Humanity, and Cosmos*. Leuven: Peeters.

<sup>6</sup> In 1985, Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann published *God in Creation*. It became a manifesto of Christian ecologically oriented theology. With it, Moltmann joined the current of ecotheology, which gained momentum starting in the 1970s.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Cobb Jr. 2000. *God and the World*. Eugene (OR): Wipf & Stock Publishers; Rosemary Radford Ruether. 2005. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC; Celia Deane-Drummond. 2016. *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Fox, Rupert Sheldrake. 1966. *Natural Grace: Dialogues on Creation, Darkness, and the Soul in Spirituality and Science*. Crown: Crown Publishing Group.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Boff. 1967. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. New York: Maryknoll; George Tinker. 2008. *American Indian Liberation. A Theology of Sovereignty*. New York: Orbis Books.

<sup>10</sup> 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).

Francis probably stand out in this regard.<sup>11</sup> In Orthodoxy, noteworthy publications by such authors as Elizabeth Theokritoff, Tatiana Goricheva, George Nalunnakkal, John D. Zizioulas have appeared.<sup>12</sup> Also important are attempts at an ecological translation of the Bible proposed, among others, by Ellen Davis.<sup>13</sup>

Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Buber as Jewish theologians have left their mark on both Christianity, and are a significant inspiration for Jewish ecology<sup>14</sup>, an interesting expression of which can also be found in the works of David Mevoror Seidenberg, who writes on Kabbalah and ecology.<sup>15</sup>

Hindu ecology is also well known, represented by Vandana Shiva, among others. Seyyid Hossein Nasr, a liberal Muslim theologian and Persian Sufi philosopher, is among the first in this circle to call for a renewed revision of the so-called Western relationship to nature.<sup>16</sup> As an evolutionary biologist, Elisabeth Sahtouris promotes the vision that care for the environment will result in the health and well-being of humanity in the larger systems of life on Earth and in the Cosmos. As a promoter of Gaia theory and collaborator with James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, she finds points of contact between Gaianism, environmentalism and major world religions.<sup>17</sup> John Collier, writing about the Indians of the Americas, also looks for a connection between ecology and religion among the indigenous peoples of North and South America.<sup>18</sup> The aforementioned authors and their works well reflect the search for a “suitable theological model” that will properly evaluate the biblical data on any relationship between God, humans and nature. New trends in modern theological sciences have begun to pay attention to both the biological

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis. 2015. *Laudato si'*. Vatican [“Francisci Summi Pontificis Litterae encyclicae Laudato si'. De communi domo colenda”. Acta Apostolicae Sedis 107: 847–944].

<sup>12</sup> George M. Nalunnakkal. 2004. *Green Liberation Towards an Integral Ecotheology*. Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Elizabeth Theokritoff. 2009. *Living in God's Creation. Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*. New York: SVS Press.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen Davis. 2009. *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture. An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel. 1983. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. Farrar, New York: Straus and Giroux.

<sup>15</sup> David Mevoror Seidenberg. 2015. *Kabbalah and Ecology. God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Vandana Shiva. 1998. *Staying Alive. Women, Ecology, and Development*. New Delhi: Zed Books; Seyyid Hossein Nasr. 1996. *Religion and the Order of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Soumaya Pernilla Ouis. 1998. “Islamic Ecotheology based on the Qur'an”. *Islamic Studies* 37 (2): 151–181.

<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Sahtouris. 2000. *Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University; Elisabeth Sahtouris. 2018. *Gaia's Dance. The Story of Earth & Us*. Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Daniel Belgrad. 2019. *The Culture of Feedback. Ecological Thinking in Seventies America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>18</sup> John Collier. 1995. *Patterns and Ceremonials of the Indians of the Southwest*. New York: Dover Publications.

and spiritual realms. Behind this is the need for a complementary component of science and religion.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. The legitimacy of human animal studies

Even a cursory review of authors and publications focused on ecotheology clearly indicates the need to notice and develop new trends in modern theological sciences. Within their framework, increasing attention is being paid to the close connection of biological, zoological, anthropological as well as spiritual/supernatural spheres. In this regard, the need for complementary studies of human – animal relations (human-animal studies) is quite clear.<sup>20</sup> It seems necessary in this case to refer to new research sub-disciplines. There are at least three terms in this domain: zootheology, animal theology, and theological zoology. The first of these, English zootheology, can be understood awkwardly as the study of gods having animal form.<sup>21</sup> However, in the proper sense, it will be a study centred around the problem of the place of animals in the history of salvation. The choice of this term may be supported by practical issues such as: unicellularity, the indication of non-human beings through the prefix zoo- used, and the similarity to the widely known and developed ecotheology. In addition, such a designation of the name of the sub discipline may help to conduct research on the animal issue in many religious systems, as within the aforementioned ecotheology.<sup>22</sup> The problem, however, remains the prefix: zoo- referring to zoological and therefore natural science.

The alternative name animal theology (animal theology) was popularized after the publication of the monograph by A. Linzey.<sup>23</sup> The publication, aimed at all people who are not indifferent to the fate of animals, has contributed to the development of many branches of theology that are not directly related to the animal issue. The author – an Anglican pastor – raises questions unfamiliar to traditional and modern theology about the soul, salvation and the place of animals in ecclesiology. The novelty of Linzey's theological solutions stems from his attempt to reinterpret and indicate possible changes in the doctrine of God

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<sup>19</sup> Stanisław Rabiej. 2020. "Ecotheology in the service of religion and science". *Studia Oecumenica* 20: 51–65.

<sup>20</sup> Margo De Mello. 2012. *Animals and Society. An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 319–321.

<sup>21</sup> Such a definition is found in: <https://www.encyclo.co.uk/>: "The study of god-animals: Zootheology is the investigation and research of animal deities and of people's worship of them".

<sup>22</sup> Ingvild Sælid Gilhus. 2006. *Animals, Gods and Humans. Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Thought*. London: Routledge.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Linzey. 1994. *Animal Theology*. London: SCM Press Ltd.

through the inclusion of non-human beings within the ambit of moral considerations. He reports on already existing discussions around the problem of the nature of animals, the possibility of their salvation or even their possession of a soul. It is likely that a close reading of many of the texts referred to by the Anglican clergyman and a relative familiarity with interconfessional theology leads to the critical tone of his claims.

On the other hand, the concept adopted by this author of the relationship of the Body of Christ to creation seems quite reconciliatory. Although it is of ancient origin, nevertheless in the interpretation of the author of the *Theology of Animals* it acquires a deeper meaning. Recalling Athanasius' statement: "For the Word has spread everywhere, above and below, deep and wide, throughout the whole world", he concludes that the "yes" of God the Creator extends to all living beings, especially those endowed with a body.<sup>24</sup> Thus the human nature (Gr. οὐσία) assumed by Christ also applies to creatures. In such optics, it is necessary to speak of the Body of Christ not only in relation to the Church and the people who may become its members, but also in relation to animals. However, the relationship between the οὐσία (ousia) of Jesus and the οὐσία of animals remains an open question. This is because it is the language of classical philosophy of a rather hermetic nature. This raises the following questions: can we then allow its modern interpretation? Can we then say that the Son of God died on the cross for the sins of all creatures, even if animals are deprived of them? At least three options are possible in the search for the right answer. One of them assumes that animals are incapable of sinning or opposing God, therefore it is not necessary to include them in the redemptive work of Christ. The second option assumes that animals have sinned and become fallen, consequently the Son of God through his incarnation in matter can reconcile them to God. The third option says that by incarnating into one of the reasonable, intelligent species, the Son of God became the de facto saviour of all creation. Each of these solutions, referring to the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God, moves towards the idea of the created world as endowed with such value that God similarly endows it with love and the will to save.<sup>25</sup>

In a similar vein, another representative of animal theology, Tatiana Mikhailovna Goricheva<sup>26</sup>, takes up the above problems. Two of her numerous

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<sup>24</sup> Athanasius. *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi* (CPG 2091). PG 23, 96–197.

<sup>25</sup> Linzey. *Animal Theology*, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Born in 1947 in St. Petersburg, she is a philosopher, theologian and translator of German. While studying philosophy, she became interested in Western "bourgeois thought", which led her to think about phenomenology and undertake a risky, clandestine correspondence with Martin Heidegger. This correspondence became the direct cause of her arrest by the KGB and subsequent cyclical interrogation. In 1973, she was baptized in an Orthodox church, which prompted her to link her underground political activities with the preaching of her not always orthodox religious beliefs.

books (2008's *Silence of Animals* and 2010's *Blessed is He Who Loves Cattle*) deal with this issue. In her view, the sanctity of animals means not only their theological equalization with humans through their common identification with the person of Christ as the Incarnate Word, but also a certain eschatological resolution. Animals can indeed be saved in the first place, as the beings closest to God. For salvation means a return to Divine reality after a period of exile and sin, a close reunion with the Creator. This prospect is open to man, but even more so to the animal, unbound by the necessity of moral reckoning. The animal has not lost its innocence, and therefore originally belongs to God – it has a “face” radiating a different sense, which appears like the image of a saint on an icon. Its silent, suffering presence in a world ruled mercilessly by man is only a period of delay, in which the promise of future divinization is inscribed. Thus, the animal, rather than being a spiritually degraded existence, a mindless bovine created to serve as the material backbone of the human economy, is the very prototype of a sanctified being.

Goricheva's theological texts reveal her strong desire that, in light of the different theological tradition that is Eastern Christianity and the Orthodox Church that emerged from it, it is possible to restore the cosmic dimension of religious faith and the mystical relationship of man with the rest of creation, which is formed primarily as a community of empathy and belonging to God. In bold formulations, it also insists on the empowerment of non-human beings, unjustly cast outside the bracket of the Christian moral imagination. Referring to patristic intuitions, as well as the spirituality of mystics and anachorets, based on closeness to nature and empathy with other creatures, he proclaims the need for an urgent return to religion in the service of ecological thinking, which today, in the face of the extreme devastation of the natural

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Involved in the opposition movement, she was also active in the late 1970s for women's rights and the spread of feminist ideas in Russia. In 1980, for her subversive activity, she was expelled from the country for eight years, which she spent in exile in France and Germany. Her books published in exile included *Nous, convertis d'Union Soviétique* [Paris 1983] and *Von Gott zu reden ist gefährlich. Meine Erfahrungen im Osten und im Westen* [Freiburg 1984]. The Secretariat she organized raised funds for the reconstruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries, funding the activities of individual parishes, and sending liturgical books and publications of a theological nature to the country. After returning to Russia in the 1990s, Goricheva also began to support the idea of animal rights, combining it with a specific interpretation of Eastern Christianity. Living in St. Petersburg, she serves as vice-chairwoman of the Russian-French Society for the Protection of Animals, and also participates in pro-animal social campaigns and the drafting of laws that concern animals and the ordering of their legal situation in Russia. See: Татьяна Горичева. 1993. Святые животные. Санкт-Петербург; К. Лученко, Татьяна Горичева: Из комсомола в экзистенциализм. (Интервью с Т.М. Горичевой). (<http://www.pravmir.ru/tatyana-goricheva-iz-komsomola-v-ekszenzializm/>); Татьяна Горичева о себе для сайта [www.pravmir.ru](http://www.pravmir.ru) [video]. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Justyna\\_Tymieniecka-Suchanek](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Justyna_Tymieniecka-Suchanek)); Justyna Tymieniecka-Suchanek. 2015. On the social and scientific condition of bioethics in Russia. The profile of Tatiana Pavlova in comparison with other animal defenders. Alina Mitek-Dziemba. 2017. “«Sacred animalism»: Tatiana Goricheva's contribution to Orthodox eco-theology”. *Zoophilologica. Polish Journal of Animal Studies* 3: 57–67.



environment, seems dramatically needed. The suffering of animals and plants, caused by human activity, is a great breach in the cosmic order, which was supposed to be cemented by the bond of sympathy and love, flowing from human likeness to God. This is why modern theology, created for a time of ecological catastrophe and man's relentless exploitation of other beings, must introduce the animal world as a third, equally important element of religious reference: in the relationship between God and humans, it's impossible to leave out the rest of creation, or rather, the array of individual, sentient, peculiarly reality-living entities that surround and fill the human space of life. It seems that without them, without a moral reckoning with the way they are treated or an attempt to alleviate their suffering, it is impossible today to think of an ecumenically open Christianity, with its broad understanding of the Church and salvation. The suffering of animals and plants, caused by human activity, is a great breach in the cosmic order, which was supposed to be cemented by a bond of sympathy and love, flowing from human likeness to God. Therefore, an ecumenical theology open to the non-human world, in an age of ecological catastrophe and man's continued exploitation of other beings, must introduce the animal world as an equally important element of religious reference. In the relationship between God and humans, it is impossible to overlook the rest of creation, or rather the array of individual, sentient, peculiarly experiencing reality entities that surround and fill the human space of life.

### 3. Ecumenical message

T. Goricheva's theological intuition suggests that it would be appropriate to appeal to the ideas of other faiths, for example, to the exegetical discoveries of Western theology made in recent years, which make it possible to dispense with harmful stereotypes rooted in Christian tradition.

One of the classic examples is the biblical: "And he blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply and populate the earth and make it subject to yourselves. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every creature that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The Hebrew verb *kabash* (kbs) appears in this text. Modern exegetes pay special attention to the interpretation of this exhortation: "Make her subject to yourselves." In Christian tradition, it has often been understood as "exploit" and "rape". According to Werner H. Schmidt's interpretation, the verb can be translated as "subjugate, rape".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Werner H. Schmidt. 1973. *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift*. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag.

However, today most theologians prefer Norbert Lohfink's interpretation. The verb *kabash* (kbs) can mean, Lohfink writes, something like "to trample with one's feet".<sup>28</sup> After all, in attempting to understand it, one must reckon with the nature of past times and the history of the Jewish people. At the time, the word was synonymous with the modern expression "to raise one's hand against someone". Lohfink, on the other hand, proposes an "undramatic" translation – "dispose of the land". Man should have precisely the kind of relationship to the land that God bestows on His creation, acting with love and care. We find similarly varied interpretations with regard to another Hebrew term *radah* (rdh). According to Schmidt, already cited, the term means "absolute dominion". Erich Zenger, on the other hand, notes, "In essence, the word signifies a shepherd's care for his flock, grazing his animals in luscious meadows, defending them from all danger, protecting them from predators (...)".<sup>29</sup>

The function and tasks of man in relation to animals and the entire created world are described by verbs whose place and use in Genesis 1:26.28 should be explained. In doing so, the difference between the quoted verses should be kept in mind. In the first case, „the earth and animals are subjected to man's dominion: "And God finally said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. Let him have dominion (Hebrew: *radah* – *rdh*) over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over all the animals that creep upon the earth!" (Genesis 1:26). Later, however, the earth and the animal world are separated: man should "populate the earth and make it subject to himself" and "rule" over all animals (Genesis 1:28). The mandate given to man to rule over the created world is expressed by various Hebrew terms. The first of these, the verb "to reign" occurring in conjunction with a preposition (Hebrew: *kabash* (kbs) – vv. 26 and 28, cf. Gen. 9:7 – in its basic sense describes the activity of "trampling" grapes in the winepress, from where the juice then flowed into prepared vats (Jl. 4:13, cf. Is. 5:1-2; Mk. 12:1-9).

As a result, it must be emphasized that the verb *kbs* belongs to those Hebrew words which express a strong exertion of force against who is in opposition. It is used both positively and negatively. Positively, it is used of Israel subjugating her enemies in war. In this context the object of *kbs* is either representing the sphere in which the inhabitants of the land operate, or the Gentiles. Negatively, it is used of the subjugation of individuals, either of people into slavery or of a woman (perhaps meaning "rape"). This positive or negative usage depends on the way which God has established the relationship between subject and ob-

<sup>28</sup> Norbert Lohfink. 1974. „Macht euch die Erde untertan?“. Orientierung 38: 137–142.

<sup>29</sup> Erich Zenger. 1983. *Gotteslogen in den Wolken. Komposition und Theologie der priester-schriftlichen Urgeschichte* (SBS 112). Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 91.

ject. For example, Israel was commanded by God to destroy the nations of Canaan. Thus *kbs* is a good activity. On the other hand, the Jews were not to force their brethren into slavery. Thus *kbs* is a bad activity. Therefore, if the relationship between subject and object is ordained to be harmonious, then *kbs* is used in a bad sense. If it is ordained to be hostile, then it is used in a positive sense. This should have great significance for Genesis 1:28. The creation in Genesis 1:31 is proclaimed by God as being very good. Man is included in this proclamation. Therefore, Man and the creation are in harmony. The relationship ordained by God between Man and the creation is good. Yet, the pattern in the Old Testament is that when the relationship between subject and object of *kbs* is to be harmonious, then the verb has a negative connotation. Genesis 1:28 is the only exception to this pattern, because *kbs* is perceived as a good activity for Man. The tension can be resolved, if an enemy or some hostile element is present operating within the sphere of the earth.<sup>30</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that the verb *kabash* (*kbs*) expresses in Genesis 1:26.28 the activity of ruling, also managing and guiding, or perhaps even shepherding living beings. The inspired author may have had in mind the taming and domestication of wild animals. At the first stage of existence, man fed only on the grain and fruits of the earth (Genesis 1:29), and animals only on any plants, so there was perfect harmony between man and the created world subject to his rule. The lack of reference to killing animals at this stage and the mention of the fullness of God's blessing (see Genesis 1:22.28) allow us to reject only the negative sense of the verb. A similar theological idea is found in the figurative language of the second description of creation in the Yahwist version (Genesis 2:18-20). A radical change in the relationship between man and the created world occurred only after the fall of Adam and Eve and the punishment imposed on humans, a change compounded even after the Flood, when God made a new covenant with mankind (Genesis 9, 1-4).

Often the privilege of "dominion" is derived from the biblical conviction that God created man in His image and likeness: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26).<sup>31</sup> A rather important detail here seems to be the plural that appears: "let us make man" (Hebrew: *na-'a-Seh*). Diverse attempts at interpretation are emerging. Among Christian exegetes, a Trinitarian explanation of the puzzling plural dominates. Other commentators propose that the plural expresses *pluralis deliberationis*, a dialogue between God and the angels

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<sup>30</sup> John Oswalt. 1980. *KBS*. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, 430. Chicago: Moody.

<sup>31</sup> W. Sibley Towner. 2005. "Clones of God Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible". *Interpretation* 59 (4): 339-447; Daniel Simango. 2013. "The law and the image of God". *Old Testament Essays* 26 (2). (7.07.2023). <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC145320>.

doing his will. Both concepts are difficult to defend, since the milieu shaping the creation of these texts did not know the truth about the triplicity of Persons in God. Additionally, the translation about angels is opposed by the context, which makes it clear that God created man in His own image, not in the image of angels. Thus, most likely, the use of the plural does not have a substantive meaning, but only a formal one. The author, by its use, wanted to indicate that God, before creating man, called “in consultation” all the already existing creatures from the bio- and zoo-spheres. Situated at the pinnacle of creation, as the summation of the entire creative work, man appears as the masterpiece of the Lord God; he is not just a “good creation” but a “very good one” (G. Ravasi).<sup>32</sup> To confirm this truth, the Hebrew language uses two Hebrew terms: “celem” and “demut”. The former indicates an image, a representation, such as a sculpture, and the latter indicates a thing similar in appearance, but not the same. The final work of creation, which is man, has an image and likeness to the already existing biological and zoological world as well as the Creator Himself. In this fact lies both the greatness of man and his responsibility for all creation, with which he should feel solidarity.<sup>33</sup>

This is aptly commented on in the text of the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 67: “We are not God. The earth existed before us and was given to us (...). While it is true that Christians have sometimes misinterpreted Scripture, we must firmly affirm today that absolute dominion over other creatures cannot be deduced from the fact of being created in God’s image and the command to make the earth subject to ourselves.” Francis reminds us that authentic concern for the environment, as a task of man in the individual and social dimensions of his activity, demands an adequate understanding of it. This concerns not only his ability to act effectively in this regard, but even more so his place in the world, his relationship to the rest of reality, the meaning and destiny of both man and the world as the environment of human life. It is necessary that this anthropological vision does not lead to an erroneous anthropocentrism, where man becomes the “master” of the world rather than its responsible steward. A particular measure of this stewardship and dominion of man is “concern for the quality of life of all beings”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Gianfranco Ravasi. 1992. *Libro del Génesis (1–11) (Guía espiritual del Antiguo Testamento)*. Barcelona: Herder; Ryan Patrick McLaughlin. 2014. *Christian Theology and the Status of Animals. The Dominant Tradition and Its Alternatives*. Springer: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>33</sup> E. Gaylon McCollough. 2007. *Let Us Make Man*. New York: Steven George Carrie, Perfect Paperback.

<sup>34</sup> The authors make similar statements: International Theological Commission. 2004. *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*. The Vatican: LEV, nr 74: “The Christian theology of creation contributes directly to the resolution of the ecological crisis by affirming the fundamental truth that visible creation is itself a divine gift, the ‘original gift’, that establishes a «space» of personal communion. Indeed, we could say that a properly Christian theology of ecology is an application of the theology of creation. Noting that the term «ecology» combines

The context of the agreement between God and man is often forgotten: “Behold, I have given you every plant in all the earth, producing seed, and every fruit tree, containing seed. They shall be food for you. And for every beast of the field, and for every fowl of the air, and for everything that moves upon the earth and has life in it, I give for food every green plant” (Genesis 1:29-30). This passage speaks of the peace that would have to exist, according to God’s design, between man and animal, and neither creature should kill the other. The theology of animals here would be some preliminary attempt to channel the reflections of human animal studies on the basis of cultural texts singling out animals. Arguably, among these, the epochal texts of the great religions shaping the functioning of social, historical and cultural reality deserve special attention. In this context, the conscious commitment of Christians to the protection of every creature demands a solid study of theological foundations. An analysis of those foundations, however, may expose some shortcomings in this regard. One danger is a certain reductionism towards the role of theology itself. An attempt to reinterpret biblical and theological anthropology may prove to be a critical point. It is worth recalling at this point the opinions of Robin Attfield, who, in a discussion with Singer, states: “(...) the tradition of viewing creatures as devoid in God’s eyes of any value other than that associated with usefulness to humans has Greek rather than Hebrew roots”.<sup>35</sup> Earlier, Peter Singer – an Australian ethicist – was one of the first to shift the burden of ethical discussions from theoretical considerations to practice. In 1979 his book *Practical Ethics* was published, which was a popular textbook on applied ethics in the Anglo-Saxon world. Developed on philosophical grounds and popularizing the idea of animal liberation, it exposed the appalling realities of today’s “factory farms” and testing procedures for zoonotic products. It has become a profound environmental, social, as well as moral issue. An important and compelling appeal to conscience, honesty, decency and justice. In contrast, this monograph, crucial to the broad philosophical debate, gave a rather cursory treatment of the Judeo-Christian tradition without a deeper understanding of theological perspectives.<sup>36</sup>

In this light, it can be deduced that animal theology is an ongoing challenge for Christian churches, and above all, solid work on its biblical foundations is needed.

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the two Greek words *oikos* (house) and *logos* (word), the physical environment of human existence can be conceived as a kind of «house» for human life.”

<sup>35</sup> Robin Attfield. 1983. *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*. New York: Columbia University Press, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Singer. 1976. *Animal liberation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

#### 4. Biblical tropes for animal theology

The Bible of Christians, like the Torah and the Koran, do not contain special chapters or works devoted to animals. Man's attitude toward animals is dealt with in Buddhism or Hinduism, as well as in the great Abrahamic religions. For the purposes of this article, consideration will be limited to the circles of Christian European culture with special emphasis on the foundations flowing from the Jewish tradition. Relating the above issues to Christian theology, it is easy to conclude that the perception of the place and role of animals in the world around us becomes ambiguous and problematic. Reaching back to Judaic roots, it should be said that also the attitude of Judaism and its philosophy towards animals is complex. On the one hand, man towards animals took a dominant position and has the right to use them also in the form of food<sup>37</sup>, on the other hand there was a strong emphasis on the ethical treatment of animals.<sup>38</sup> Animals as a special creation of God represented a greater value than objects and therefore deserved respect, but occupied a lower place in the hierarchy of creatures than humans.<sup>39</sup> Attempts to blur the differences in the hierarchy of living beings were considered dangerous, since such an ideology could lead to the introduction of animal worship and negate the value of human life.

References to animals appear in the Bible from its earliest pages, which describe the creation of the world, to the last book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse, which presents visions of a "new heaven and a new earth." The presence of animals in the pages of the Bible can be considered in two aspects. On the one hand, these descriptions depict the role of animals in everyday human life, while on the other hand, these references should be considered as a literary motif used to illustrate a spiritual reality, which is the relationship between God and man, or God and the Chosen People as a whole. A similar context is found in the New Testament, where images of animal husbandry are used primarily to depict the relationship between God and man or those present and used in the household.<sup>40</sup> Images of animals are not as numerous as in the Old Testament, occurring rather in the background of the proclamation of the Good

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<sup>37</sup> "God blessed them. God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1, 28); "Every moving thing that lives will be food for you. As the green herb, I have given everything to you" (Gen 9, 3). It should be noted here that man received permission to eat meat only after the original sin.

<sup>38</sup> "If you see the donkey of him who hates you fallen down under his burden, don't leave him, you shall surely help him with it" (Ex 23, 5).

<sup>39</sup> "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together" (Dt 22, 10); "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out [the grain]" (Dt 25, 4).

<sup>40</sup> "Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it?" (Lc 15, 4).

News. Jesus' consumption of fish or the Passover lamb contradicts the idea that He was a vegetarian, although this fact is not stated explicitly in the Bible<sup>41</sup>, it arises from the context and interpretation of the way of life of Jesus, who did not come to change the law, but to fulfil it.<sup>42</sup> In vegetarian circles, the commandment "thou shalt not kill" also applies to animals. We assume that the words of Jesus presented in the Gospel according to St. Matthew on the interpretation of this commandment apply not only to humans, but also to living beings such as animals.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, we interpret Jesus' attitude to the sacrifices offered to God – he indicates that what is important is the attitude to God, not the sacrificial victim itself.<sup>44</sup> It is noteworthy that it is in this context that the Apostle Paul states that the Kingdom of God is not about settling material things, but refers to spiritual values such as justice or peace.<sup>45</sup> These words were intended to settle disputes over different customs that were occurring in the Christian community between members of Jewish and Gentile origin.

Already the analysis of these selected passages of Scripture shows that a proper understanding of the regulations flowing from God's commandments and the correct observance of them guarantee harmony and balance between man and animals. On this basis, it can be concluded that, for the sake of God's Spirit, man is capable of living in such a way as not to cause animals unnecessary pain and suffering, while keeping in mind their usefulness according to God's plan. The analysis of the cited texts shows that it is possible to maintain a proper hierarchy of values, the goal of which is neither to "animalize" man nor to "humanize" animals.

## 5. Conclusions

The vision of man, God and the world formed within the framework of Eastern Christianity, since patristic times having its own mental specificity, which is fully manifested in the spirituality of Orthodoxy. This is an extremely interesting idea, showing that what we know as the logocentric alliance of Platonic-

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<sup>41</sup> "He said to them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took it, and ate in front of them" (Lc 24, 41b-43).

<sup>42</sup> "Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt 5, 17).

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said to them of old time, «You shall not murder»; and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment' (Mt 5, 21).

<sup>44</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law-justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone" (Mt 23, 23).

<sup>45</sup> "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rm 14, 17).

Cartesian-Baconian philosophy and Thomistic theology does not exhaust the religious message of the Christian tradition, and thus allows us to think for this Western metaphysics an alternative – and a truly “salutary” alternative for the animal world. God’s reincarnation understood as entering the body, a blessing for all matter, rather than a tribute to human cognitive abilities, but also a certain eschatological resolution – that animals can indeed be saved, and saved in the first place, as beings closest to God. For salvation means a return to Divine reality after a period of exile and sin, a close reunion with the Creator. This prospect is open to man, but even more so to the animal, unbound by the necessity of moral reckoning. This gesture of radically spiritualizing animals, giving them a religious identity, certainly close to heresy for many, takes for granted that religion, and Christianity in particular, bears part of the moral responsibility for the ecological crisis, as the force that actually sets the wheels in motion for modern anthropocentrism, with its Faustian belief in the unlimited possibilities of human development and the unmitigated hubris of the rational subject.<sup>46</sup> The thought of the religious status of animals takes nothing away from his spirituality of man and does not deny the full transcendence of God, conceived far more broadly than simply as an infinite distance from creation. Without abandoning the idea of transcendence conceived in ontological and epistemological terms, one would have to rethink the problem of the immanent presence of the Creator in creation. Christianity is not pantheism, and therefore it is not a matter of reducing divinity to existence within the material. The incarnation of Christ puts the lie to such an interpretation. The incarnation is a fact that constitutes the strongest evidence of the divine will to identify with the entire material world, evidence of its sanctification and blessing. After all, the original covenant is made by the Creator with all living beings and concerns their peaceful coexistence and future destiny. Similarly, God’s coming to earth is related to the acceptance of the material body with all its limitations. This is by no means contradicted by the vision of Christ as the eternal Logos, invoked very often to affirm the special privileges of man by Western theology. In the ideally Christian vision, the realm of bio – zoo – anthro – that is, the world of nature, plants and animals, forms, together with human beings, a great community directing towards God the eternal song of creation, a cosmic hymn of praise and thanksgiving, “that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

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<sup>46</sup> Desmond Hosford. 2010. “Uneasy Anthropocentrism. Cartesianism and the Ethics of Species Differentiation in Seventeenth Century France”. *Journal of Advanced Composition* 30 (3–4): 515–538.



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