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**ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION
THROUGH LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE.
ASPECTS OF ORTHODOX TRADITION**

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The problem of ecology is becoming increasingly serious in our time because it takes into direct account life's resources and applies to individual, as well as global, survival. Although specialists put mammoth efforts into creating a sustainable world through technological and mathematical methods, the fundamental problem reaches no resolution and there continues to emerge risk of relapsing into an ecological crisis. The answer needs sought in correcting the illusion of the myth with economic or material ends and adding an open mind to the ambience that awakens profound sentiments of reciprocity and respect. Liturgical experience awakens the human conscience through participation not only of the mind, but also through the whole being, with its emotions and specific language. Synchronisation with natural cycles presents natural elements such as water, vegetation such as flowers, branches, iconic images depicting a natural medium are concurrently ritual conditions and methods of educating for a life that is at one with nature.

Keywords: Ecology, Environment, Religion, Liturgy, Orthodox.

**ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ
ЧЕРЕЗ ЛИТУРГИЧЕСКИЙ ОПЫТ.
АСПЕКТЫ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ**

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Экологические проблемы в наше время заслуживают все большего внимания, так как они напрямую затрагивают жизненно важные ресурсы, и от них зависит вопрос выживания человека, как в глобальном, так и в индивидуальном смысле. Несмотря на беспрецедентные усилия специалистов по исправлению ситуации с помощью технологических и математических методов, решение фундаментальной проблемы пока не найдено. По сей день

существует риск наступления экологического кризиса на Земле. Ответ следует искать в отказе от мифа об исчерпанных экономических и материальных ресурсах и развернутом понимании окружающей среды как источника взаимных любви и уважения. Литургический опыт пробуждает совесть человека, так как в нем задействован не только мозг, но и все человеческое существо с его эмоциями и особенным языком. Синхронизация с природными циклами представляет собой погружение в природную стихию, например воду, и флору, т.е. цветы и ветви. Изображения на иконах, содержащие элементы природы, представляют собой не только богослужебные предметы, но и эффективный способ воспитания личности, живущей в гармонии с природой.

Ключевые слова: экология, окружающая среда, религия, Литургия, Православие.

Introduction

The problem of ecology is becoming increasingly serious in our time. It is relatively easy to observe the degradation of nature, without a need for complex analysis. Environmental issues or those which relate to food safety require immediate response and remedy. This is an extreme negative global phenomenon which relates directly to life's resources and apply to individual, as well as global, survival.

The general situation necessitates an immediate response, not only to address for the causes, but remedy them. In my opinion, to identify a competent response it is necessary to give increased attention to the source or resource that can sustain the solution. The tendency of the majority of current research holds a wholly technological response to the ecological crisis. I believe that, with all the specialised merit for a sustainable world presented by this domain, the fundamental problem is not resolved and there exists a continued risk of relapsing into an ecological crisis. Answers needs to be sought in the human conscience of being part of a global system named the cosmos [11]. Although they vary from natural elements, humans remain permanently anchored to a physical reality of the world and define themselves solely in relation to this world. By this motive, humans remain indebted to nature. More so,

being a superior being over other species, humans have the duty to maintain and intensify relationships and connections within the natural sphere. Nature is a gift which becomes a vehicle for love, as stated by Dumitru Stăniloae: “In essence, through the gift of the world, God wants to make Himself known to man through His love. As such man must also rise above the gifts received, to God himself who gave them. In a way, the giver renounces the gift for the love of the receiver” [10, p. 236].

An initial idea which I maintain in this article is that response to the ecological crisis is a problem of mentality. To move away from this complicated and difficult situation it is necessary to correct the mythical technical illusions with economic or material ends, and to add an open minded mentality to the ambience which awakens profound sentiments of reciprocity and respect. As such, resolving the ecological crisis may occur through education humans to perceive the environment differently.

Among those who have a religious affinity, frequently more is mentioned about the “ecological sin”. Along with personal or social sin, humans can commit offences towards nature or life, which are gifts from God. Sin refers to interference with, or destruction of the project of the Creator’s harmonious world, in which His reason or spirit, is imprinted. Creating unbalance to the ecosystem through pollution and extinction of facts represents a disobedience and offence to God, which constitutes a grave sin. In the context of interaction between ecology and Christian religion the new domain of Ecotheology is borne [3].

Yet, certain authors, such as the celebrated Lynn White, have been inclined to accuse Christianity of the appearance of the ecological crisis, through literarily interpretation and isolated to a single biblical passage: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28) [8]. I do not wish to correct the exegesis of the Bible’s words, which are directed in the opposite sense, towards the maintenance and conservation of the ecosystem. My intention is to show that Christian religion in general, in particular the Orthodox faith, have continued since the oldest times to remind people of their place in the cosmos, to awaken their compassionate sentiments towards nature and to form an open and

accepting mind to their surroundings. Religious services are traditions practiced since the beginnings of Christianity which are true schools for solidarity (Eco-social) and sustainability (Ecology). Analysis of the constituent elements shows that these performative actions can be instruments through which the ecological revolution may be borne as an internal change in humans, preceding any technical or economic support.

Natural language of Liturgy

For those who enter an Orthodox Church, during a religious service, participation is not solely through the mind, but with the whole being, with emotions and its language. The celebratory body, which permits the subject to enter into the liturgical atmosphere, is the same body integrated in the surrounding environment as well as the cosmic dimension for accepting living conditions. As such, the Liturgy for people takes into account corporal mechanisms as mediators for discovering the human otherness. Yet from its formation, Liturgy proposes in a condensed and symbolic sense, the whole cosmos in the celebratory space.

Therefore, those who participate in a ritual action do not do so extrinsically or neutrally, thus it is introduced into permanent communication with the body as an intermediary. Ritual events are filled with natural elements or of ambient images. As such, why can we say that the liturgical space is also defined through obligatory material elements, which make reference to nature. There exist prescriptions which hold on to the Orthodox tradition and are vehemently respected by its believers. Synchronisation with natural cycles, present natural elements such as water, of vegetation such as flowers, branches, iconic images using natural mediums are at the same time conditions of the mind and means of education for a life lived passively with nature.

It is very important to underline that, while it differs from a spiritual experience of a meditative or contemplative type, Liturgy realises a communication with God through the intermediary of nature. Participants recognise nature as a gift from God for which they give thanks and praise also through the intermediary of natural based offerings. The liturgical experience is not solely given through the

presence of environmental elements, neither is it generated exclusively by the interiority of the Christian, but by these two poles working together. Liturgy acknowledges a context in which a symbolic change takes place between that which can be seen and that which is unseen. I will continue to present several elements which sustain the presence of nature in Christian Orthodox ritual:

The Sun and the Moon

Even though time has a mistagogical and eschatological value in the liturgical worship of the church, being at the simultaneously memory, present and future, being of a specific order unfolding the masses which take into account the astronomical movements of the sun and of the moon. The Orthodox Church calendar, even though it begins on the 1st of September each year, takes into account astronomic realities. Two principal criteria lead the way in the construction of a liturgical calendar: the first relates to the major celebrations such as Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, which created liturgical cycles with differing rules centred around the respective celebrations; the second relates to the astronomical division of the civil calendar (days, weeks, months, and years). Yet from the oldest of times, the church was mindful of the mathematical accuracy of movements around the Sun and thus adopted or reviewed the correct chronology in the function of corrections made, such as the last realised by Pope Gregory XIII in the year 1582. Similarly, even though the liturgical day begins with the evening Vespers, the typical church takes into account the duration of the Earth's complete rotation on its axis. In this way it is not identical to the astronomical one, the liturgical day comprises complete cycles of masses (the seven praises – Vespers, Compline, Midnight Mass, Matins, Watches I, III, VI, IX and the Liturgy) which are repeated following the same schedule. Yet the most crucial presence of the Sun and the Moon in the liturgical spatial performance is in determining the date of Easter, the celebration around which the entire Christian edifice of the church is based.

The church observes to natural astronomical phenomena upon which to establish the Resurrection of Christ: the spring equinox which is tied to the observable movement of the Sun and which has a fixed date, and the full moon,

which occurs on a variable date. With these conditions taken into consideration, the date of Easter is set each year: the first Sunday, after the Full Moon, after the Spring Equinox. Although there are more associations between Planets and the Orthodox religion, for reasons of space, I would like to add a further two liturgical actions which have a cosmological foundations. The architecture of Orthodox churches always assumed placement to the East of the Altar, that is to say, the most sacred place in the building to hold the Biblical words: “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). The final example I would like to mention is related to the ministry of the dead. With hands folded in prayer on the chest, the dead body, when lowered into the ground is placed with the feet in the direction of the rising Sun. The teaching of the Church is that it is from this direction that God will appear at the Second Coming.

Water

One of the most widespread substances on planet Earth – water, is an ever present element in the Orthodox religion. It can be the means of cleaning, of healing or of consecration. One of the episodes in which it’s importance is remarked upon is found in the preparation of the gifts (bread and wine, which will be further discussed) for their transformation into the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist, the central part of the Liturgy, is the essence of Christianity in general. The presence of water is necessary for the mixing of wine from the chalice, which is said to be a real representation of the water which poured together with the blood of Christ from his rib, at the Crucifixion (John 19, 34). Also at the moment of Eucharist the ritual of “Heat” is to be recalled, where the priest pours hot water into the chalice. After the Eucharistic bread has been broken, the priest receives hot water in a special vessel from the deacon, which is spilled while making the sign of the Cross while he chants: “the warmth of faith is filled with the Holy Spirit”. According to Nicolae Cabasila, the symbolism of the heat is found in descent of the Holy Spirit over the church [4]. Cleanliness and holiness (sanitation), in the spirit of universality, are the main references of water from Eucharistic worship: if from the spilling of the blood of

Christ the universal sacrifice for man's sins to be forgiven is realised, in combination with hot water this cleanliness is consolidated in a state of grace among the faithful.

Perhaps the most commonly known Orthodox ritual which incorporates water is the sacrament of Baptism. In the case of young children, most frequently the case in the Orthodox Church, the rule is that this is done through submersion three times over. Only in clinical cases, when the willing is gravely ill, or in cases where there is a lack of water, the baptism can be done by splashing. In all other cases, complete bodily submersion occurs. It is an emotional moment, with dramatic highlights, as much for the baptised as for those present in the church. Water in the font placed in the ecclesial space is blessed through epiclesis prayers ("You yourself, lover of mankind, Emperor, come again now, through the descent of Your Holy Spirit, and bless this water...and give it the grace and redemption of the River Jordan. Make her not the spring of unrighteousness, but of holiness, free of sin, healer of diseases, perishing devils, righting the powers of adversaries, filled with angelic power...") and liturgical gestures (making the sign of the cross with the right hand and blowing in the formation of the Cross). In a biblical text which makes reference to this very mass, it is said that: "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). As such, water which possesses divine power is a universal condition for reconciliation, forgiveness and coexistence within Christian principles. The effect of receiving this sacrament of water is forgiveness of sins, rebirth or being born again into a new life which is clean, spiritual and embraced at the core of the Christian Church.

However, the use of water in sacrament is not exclusively for use on humans. Numerous masses exist in which the water helps as an instrument to bless and sanctify objects of worship, those necessary for human life, the works and fruits of the earth. Through the water blessing, these receive Godly powers which are transferred to materials with which it comes into contact. In the Orthodox Church, this consecration (Αγιασμα) can be great or small, based on its function. The major Holy Water is done in the church during the celebration of Christ's Baptism, at the same time the minor one can be made as it is needed, in the church or outside of it.

The major Holy Water is used for during the exorcism of people or things, cleaned, blessed or holy: the cleaning of dirty fountains, to help in sanctifying churches, Crosses, bells, vessels and church garments [1, p. 263]. The faithful drink from this for eight consecutive days, while those who are turned away from Communion can take this water as a lesser substitute. The minor Holy Water is used for blessing objects of human dependence, without exception: the house, household objects, animals, the sick, fields, cars, etc. Along with its purifying and holy qualities, it is noteworthy that this quality in water also has the power to unify the entire world. Water receives spirit from God and transmits this to all other creatures. The universal dimension of water is put in light of the cosmic characteristics of Christ's baptism, an event mentioned in the Mass prayer: "Today the body of water is sanctified and the Jordan River stops its water flowing... Bless me and the waters, Saviour". As such, by coming into contact with the River Jordan, Christ blessed not only it, but all bodies of water, by the overflow of grace in them, in doing so they were transformed into mediums of purification and blessing. The first Christian writers saw this similarity between water and Godly power, based on the universality and necessity for life: "And why did He call the grace of the Spirit water? Because by water all things subsist; because water brings forth grass and living things; because the water of the showers comes down from heaven; because it comes down one in form, but works in many forms" [2, 277].

Genuine natural elements: basil, flowers, tree branches

Nature is also present in the Orthodox faith through vegetable elements, taken and brought into the church direct from nature. Man is not the owner of, but the priest of creation, who is obliged to create communion within nature: Man's responsibility is to draw from nature a Eucharistic reality, to make, as such, nature capable of communion. If man succeeds, then the Truth gains a sense for the whole cosmos, Christ becomes cosmic Christ and mankind on the whole is inhabited by Truth, which is none other than communion with the Creator [14, p. 123].

From these, we can recall basil, tree branches such as willow or walnut and flowers. Basil is an aromatic herb which is associated with water. Its transformation

into a helpful instrument for splashing with water, does not have a standard prescription, but arises from the practical church tradition in prayer. Basil is also found in the Liturgy of the third Sunday of Lent and at the Elevation of the Cross. In both situations, the plant is used for adorning the Cross which is taken out in the procession in the middle of the church to be honoured by the congregation through making the sign of the Cross and kissing it. Along with basil, flowers are also used for decorating the Cross. These are traditionally brought by the congregation as an offering of appreciation for historical events in Christianity represented in the place of worship. It symbolises the fact that on Good Friday the Epitaph is taken into the middle of the church, an icon painted with cloth which represents the placement of Christ in the tomb. In current practice, he is seated together with the gospel on a higher table. The gather faithful kiss the Gospel and the Epitaph, placing flowers of the table and pass underneath it, an action which symbolises passing through the tomb of Christ. At the conclusion of the Mass they take the flowers back, now blessed by the priest.

At the feast of Christ entering Jerusalem we focus on another characteristic natural element: willow branches. Whether at processions which bring to the fore biblical images, or at Sunday Mass, the faithful bring braches from this specific tree which take on the symbolism of the original palm. It is of interest that the willow is blessed at the church, so that it may later be used domestically, by being placed at the domestic threshold or with an icon. In other words, the natural element which is brought to the church and through which faith is manifested, is transformed through blessing. Once taken from the church, it is forbidden that they be thrown away or placed in insalubrious areas. The case is similar with walnut leaves, which are brought to the church services from Whit Monday. At the end of the Liturgy they are blessed and given among the congregation, symbolising the flames in the form of the innumerable gifts of the Holy Spirit. Again in this case, nature brought in its pure state to the church as an offering of faith is metamorphosed into a manifestation of the sacred.

Contemporary Orthodox theology has its roots in this principle, of real-world divine-human realism [9]. Mediator of grace, nature awakens a new conscience in those who partake in Orthodox rituals. With respect to God's creation which brings a clean sacrifice, man receives an environment filled with spirit that on which one's life integrally depends, physically and spiritually.

Natural elements transformed: oil, bread, wine

Of the elements processed by humans the one most widely used in the Orthodox mass is oil. We find it as a source of illumination for lighting candles. It is also the one on which varied spices of the church's holy oil, which is used in the sacrament of repentance as well as the blessing of the church, the altar and corporals (antimensions), these being objects without which the church cannot undertake acts of worship. Oil is also used in the Sacrament of Baptism, at Holy Unction and blessing of homes. Of worthy mention is also the specific object used in the Romanian Orthodox church for anointing the faithful, used by the priest at the end of each Mass. The anointing is applied to the forehead, in the sign of the Cross. The symbolism, the same which can also be found through the presence of the bread and wine, is that of passive Communion among all beings, as stated by John Chrysostom "For what is the bread? The Body of Christ. And what do they become who partake of it? The Body of Christ: not many bodies, but one body. For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains no where appear; they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction; so are we conjoined both with each other and with Christ: there not being one body for you, and another for your neighbor to be nourished by, but the very same for all" [7, p. 323]. The systemic size is strengthened by the words spoken by the priest in accompaniment to the liturgical gesture "My help is from the Father, he who created the Heavens and Earth!" The focal point of Orthodox worship, the real presence of Christ is associated with two natural elements: the bread and wine. According to Orthodox teachings, the items which believers take to the altar are two conditions of life and as such are offered symbolically as a sacrifice of His life.

Of note is that these are produce, as such the result of work and effort on the part of people. It can be said that it is a matter of a double effort: on the one hand, man is committed to harvesting raw materials offered by nature; while on the other hand, he is careful and takes pains to transform them into something which is pleasing, even to the Creator himself. As such, the liturgical gesture in which the faithful bring produce to the church perpetuates the idea that they are responsible for nature and prudently cooperate with the Creator in modifying it. The next step, where the produce is transformed from something material to something spiritual, into the Body and Blood of Christ becomes an ecological criterion for the 21st century: the redemption and salvation of man by Christ takes place on three transformative levels: human, biological and material [5]. Along with their use as the basis for the Eucharist, the bread and wine are also used in other rituals, Lity, memorial services, the Sacrament of Marriage or Celebrations for the dead. In all instances, the oil, wine and bread all represent man's offerings to God from the fruits of the earth following the Old Testament (Num. 18:12), as they are principle elements for survival. It must also be noted that the transformation of these elements through worship does not affect their physical nature. As such, God intervenes beyond physical limits of the created world by changing them, while their structure remains unaltered. It is a model of intervention which believers are urged to follow. Those who take part in Orthodox Mass are able to understand that the relationship with nature is intimate and is not through any form of destructive intervention. More so, following the divine model, man must commune with nature, to put his own soul into it.

Icon – the presence of grace in materials, through human work

A constant presence in the church, as well as in domestic abodes, the icon is the real transfiguration of materials and spiritual incarnation. It represents another perfect world, within the limits of this world. Through work inspired by people, the material undertakes a new Heavenly form bordering worldly materialism. It combines within its workings two directions which are predominantly considered alternative to one another: the spiritual and the material. So, Byzantine sensitivity which is transformed into modern day Orthodox iconography, presents a materialistic

experience which differs even from Western Christianity: if at first nature is a window through which to see the invisible, Western Art initiated by the Renaissance is a production based on technological capacity which solely transmits emotion [6]. To demonstrate its polarity, the icon which sustains material spirituality also contains a latent potential to come to life. Man is capable of this work which addresses the separation between Heaven and Earth. With this motive, the theology of the icon can be a model for the relationship with nature for Christian Orthodox, a model for creation [3]. The icon is a melding of the aesthetic and the spiritual, without exclusivity. It is simultaneously a form of art and of worship. Its aesthetic sensibilities converge with its spiritual sensibilities. With beauty as intermediary, in the objective form of the tradition of iconography, man can enter a different sphere, that of faith

Conclusion

The environmental crisis created by man is essentially a moral issue. The first idea sustained in this study is that this problem cannot be solved without the development of an ecological conscience. From a Christian viewpoint, all creation stems from God, which is the prime motivation for its care and advancement. Man cannot become the enemy of nature and under no circumstances because it's destruction: "The so-called environmental crisis is not primarily technological or economic but, much more profoundly, personal and spiritual. It is really a crisis, not in the physical environment as such, but in the human heart" [13, p. 11]. Its neglect would lead to an extinction of life and a denial of God as Creator. The second idea developed in this work is that the Liturgy is primordial place in which man awakens or rediscovers his ecological conscience.

The Liturgy not only receives natural elements, but also depends on them. Elements which are cosmic, natural or manmade are a constant presence in the unfolding of rituals. This implication of nature in worship denotes the fact that the church does not condone treatment of the environment through a passive or neutral rapport. Humans are indebted and must care for natural elements and the ways in which they are processed. Respect for nature is evident through nature being

considered a form of non verbal communication with the Divine. As such, environmental responsibility not only comprises its conservation, but active betterment and participating in God's will to perfect nature [12]. While this argument is limited to space, the Orthodox Church in general and especially the Liturgy promote responsibility for mankind, solidarity and charity. The Liturgy offers education focused on the intervention of the faithful with nature. Water used at the Sacrament of Baptism needs to be natural, clean and wholly untainted. The bread is prepared from "flour of clean grain, leaven and sweetened with salt". The wine must be unspoiled, only using grapes, without additives of sugar or chemical agents.

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