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Deforestation and Ecological Crisis. A Case Study in the Post-Communist Context of Romania from an Orthodox Perspective

Abstract

The Orthodox Church proposes a eucharistic and ascetic ethos within contemporary society. At the same time, even if ecological education becomes a study discipline in the school, this branch needs much more attention from the Priests of the Church. They often enjoy a greater authority concerning human persons. Another vision for the future can be constituted as the Church helps young people start different ecological programs.

In light of this reality where the ecological crisis threatens people's lives more and more, each Church should engage in projects or local initiatives that lead



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to the enhancement of all creation. Each Church is requested to undertake projects, be aware of human persons, encourage alternative energy, water conservation, and organize recycling programs.

Keywords

Ecotheology, deforestation, Romania, education,

1 Einleitung

Eastern Europe is a region with a continental temperate climate and has, therefore, natural conditions for the growth of forests. The history confirms the existence of extensive forests that covered this region in the recent past. Nowadays, however, the phenomenon of deforestation has become an acute problem, very serious in some countries. Among all the nations of Eastern Europe, Romania seems to be the most affected by the phenomenon of deforestation.

Moreover, after 1989, the rapid process of deforestation was coupled with an intensification of natural disasters in Romania, and, as a consequence, more and more human lives were lost. These painful realities urged me to choose this topic.

The deforestation phenomenon and the irrational exploitation of resources are closely linked with people's prevailing mentality and attitude toward creation.

In Romania, 86,7 % of the population belongs to the Orthodox Church. Consequently, the Orthodox theology, liturgy, and praxis is expected to also the faith and the concrete attitude of people towards God, one another, and the whole creation.

The basic Orthodox theological understanding which can respond to the present-day ecological crisis of deforestation is that of creation in relation to God, the Creator, of the human being

and whole cosmoses co-created realities. For that reason, a particular emphasis was given in this research to the Orthodox understanding of creation.

Although the ecological crisis is a matter of science and in great measure of ethics, education, and legislation, it is also a matter of theology. The church's involvement in the protection of the natural environment is a matter of faithfulness to her tradition and to her nature. That is why another part of the research concentrates on the praxis of Orthodox Theology in relation to creation of the new and rapidly growing consumerist attitude. I propose answers by attending to the traditional, well-known and widely practiced Orthodox principle of ecological ascetism.

2 Deforestation and its impact on Romanian's environment

According to the European Commission, "the forests and other types of land with forest vegetation cover about 176 million ha throughout the European Union territory about 42% of its terrestrial surface, compared with 26,7% in Romania."¹ In comparison, 43,5% of Croatian territory², 33% of the Czech Republic³, 28,1%

¹ Victor Giurgiu, "Considerații asupra stării Pădurilor Romaniei," in: *Revista Pădurilor*, București: Editura Regia Națională a Pădurilor – Romsilva și Societatea Progresul Silvic, 2010, nr. 2, 3-16, p. 5.

² Slavko Matic, "The Forests of Croatia – Country Report," in: Jurij Diaci (ed.), *Forest Reserves in Central and East European Countries – History, Present Status and Future Development*, Slovenia: Department of Forestry and Renewable Forest Resources, 1999, 17-24, p. 17.

³ Libor Hort, Vladimír Tesař and Tomáš Vrška, "Forest Reserve Research Network – The Czech Republic Country Report," in: Jurij Diaci (ed.), *Forest Reserves in Central and East European Countries – History, Present Status and Future Development*, 25-44, p. 25.

of Poland⁴, and 60% of Slovenia⁵ were covered by forests in 2011. Romania lacks forests in comparison with the forest zones of other Eastern European countries, forests which are considered as a fundamental component of the environmental balance. Apart from the natural calamities which affect the forested zones (fires due to high temperatures, floods, high winds which uproot trees), humanity can increase or decrease these surfaces. If by the end of the 19th century deforestations within the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space were limited only to ensure a surface necessary “form the nucleus of a village or of a field either for ploughing or pasture,”⁶ beginning with the 19th century, timber is regarded as a merchandise, and the forest is subject to pressure by numerous competitive consumers created by the process of industrialization. Together with the idea of societal development, deep changes appeared within this geographic space so that the building of the railroads and of telecommunications required increasing quantities of timber which resulted in the “disappearance of 128,000 ha between the years 1921-1935.”⁷

⁴ Roman Zielony, “Natural Forests and Forests Protected by Law in Poland,” in: Jurij Diaci (ed.), *Forest Reserves in Central and East European Countries – History, Present Status and Future Development*, 45-66, p. 45.

⁵ Barbara Mörec and Klavdija Jeromel, *The efficiency and performance analysis of Slovenian forest enterprises*, posted no date, accessed on 18th september 2021, 1, website: <http://oliver.efri.hr/~euconf/2011/docs/Session7/1.%20Mörec%20Jeromel.pdf>.

⁶ Ion Băcănaru și Ion Velcea, *Zona și Mediul Geografic. Implicații în Dinamica Societății Contemporane*, Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2003, p. 232.

⁷ Constanța Popescu, *Monografia Județului Dâmbovița*, Târgoviște: Editura Biblioteca, 2006, p. 135.

2.1 The abuse of forests by human behavior in Romania after the fall of the Communist regime (1989)

Romania's forested areas were also under threat during the communist rule, from December 1947 to December 25th 1989. Under the influence of Romanian communist thinking and the population's continuous pressure, in 1974, there were 163,200 ha less than the 6,476,000 ha existing in 1938.⁸

1989 brought major changes in Romania, both political, as the Communist Party was overthrown, and forest legislation changed. In 1989, all forests belonged either to the state or to some central or local administration, and their management was exercised directly or under state control. After 1989, the Romanian Government passed different laws regarding the national forest administration.

Thus, the promulgation of law 18 from 1991 and law 1 from 2000 by the Government of Romania and their voting in Parliament had a negative impact upon the forest surfaces in Romania which at the end of 1990 was of 6,252,300 ha under state administration.⁹ Thus, by article 45, par. 1 of the law 18 from the year 1991, the partial restitution of the forests to the former owners without observing the old location is underlined: "The natural persons or their heirs, whose lands with forest vegetation passed into the state property as a result of some special statute, can request the reconstruction of the property right also for the difference of more than 1 ha, but not more than 30 ha per family."¹⁰The law 18 from the year 1991 "allowed restitution of

⁸ Nicolae N. Constantinescu, *Economia protecției mediului înconjurător*, București: Editura Politică, 1976, p. 247.

⁹ Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul Statistic al României pentru anul 1990*, București, (unpublished document).

¹⁰ Parlamentul României, "Legea 18/1991, capitolul III, art. 45, alin. 1," republicată în: *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I, (5 ianuarie 1998), nr. 1, 1-10, p. 8.

400,000 forest properties from the State Fund”¹¹ to natural persons. The law 1 from the year 2000, “...the former owner or his heir must observe and permit necessary works of intervention or can opt for restitution of another land”,¹² made it possible to transfer property from the public domain of the state to different beneficiaries “who could choose these lands while possession was guaranteed only by the presence of witnesses.”¹³ According to those two laws, in 2010 were recorded “1 million owners whose forests had been restituted,”¹⁴ an exponentially growing tendency in the future, hard to control by the forest authorities. The restitution of the forested zones is an act of social justice, on the one hand. Still, on the other, applied to the situation of Romania where there was no exact law until 2008 regarding the forests’ protection, it has had devastating consequences both upon the Carpathian-Danubian –Pontic forests and upon the life of the society.

The effects of the two laws together resulted in the diminishing and the scattering of the forest areas, state-owned property, and in the stealing and degradation of this land as the owners no longer had any personal interest in protecting its integrity. Once in possession of the forested zone, people did not treat it as something to be preserved and renewed by planting young trees for a healthy life and ecological balance. Rather, they considered the forests something they could deal with as they wished. Consequently, they no longer respected the size of the forested areas, which should be renewed by cutting down some trees and planting others (the surface settled by the forest authority differs

¹¹ Victor Giurgiu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

¹² Parlamentul României, “Legea 1/2000, Capitolul III, art. 24, sublinea-
tul 1.4,” in: *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I, (12 ianuarie 2000), nr. 8, 1-6, p. 4.

¹³ Alexandrina Ilica, “Douădecenii (1989 -2009) de silvicultură în tranziție,” în: *Revista Pădurilor*, București: Editura Regia Națională a Pădurilor – Romsilva și Societatea “Progresul Silvic”, 2009, nr. 2, 45-47, p. 45.

¹⁴ Victor Giurgiu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

from one year to another); they cut the trees arbitrarily either to sell or to use in their households. This action constituted what is usually called the abuse of human behavior upon forests. Therefore, if during the communist period Romania had “only 0.35 ha forested area per capita, compared with 0.62 in former Yugoslavia, 0.48 in Bulgaria”¹⁵, in 1998 due to continuous cuttings, “the percentage dropped to 0.27 ha per capita.”¹⁶ The negative effects of the forests’ restitution to their former owners were stated in the declaration of Romania’s Prime-Minister from 2002, Adrian Nastase: “The danger of diminishing of the surface of the national forest fund and implicitly of the forest planting percentage was, unfortunately, aggravated after 1990, by the restitution of some surfaces to their owners.”¹⁷

People’s abuses upon the Romanian forests also appear in the Statistics Annuary of Romania, published by the National Institute of Statistics. According to these data if in 1990 there were in Romania 6,252,000 ha forested zone, in 1991 was recorded a slight growth up to 6253 thousand ha, but in 1999 appears a real loss to 6,226,000 ha. Ever since 2000 when there were 6,223,000ha a new level of losses of up to 6,221,000ha is recorded in 2003.¹⁸ Due to this abuse, which was growing year after year, and Romania’s acceptance into the EU, procedures developed that allowed people to re-plant trees in ill favored zones, thus recording a slight growth of the forested areas which “in 2005 were of 6,233.000 ha.”¹⁹ Also, since 2007, together with the signing of Romania’s Treaty of Adherence to EU, the NGO named “Ecological Network Nature 2000” (founded in Rio de Janeiro,

¹⁵ Adrian Nastase, Cf. Nicolae N. Constantinescu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 245.

¹⁶ Ion Băcănaru și Ion Velcea, *Op. Cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁷ Victor Giurgiu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ Institut Național de Statistici, *Anuarul Statistic al României pentru anii 1990 – 2003*, București (unpublished document).

¹⁹ Idem, *Anuarul Statistic al României pentru anii 2004-2005*, București, (unpublished document).

Brazilia, 1992) began to operate in Romania. It promotes “the modern concepts to preserve natural riches by rationally managing the resources.”²⁰ Therefore, as a result of this NGO’s activity on the territory of Romania, and of the new Forest Code from 2008, which clearly states that “the totality of forests, of lands destined to be planted (...) gathered in forest enclosures on January 1 1990 (...) in accordance with the law, represents, irrespective of the nature of the property right, the national forest fund”²¹, the forested surfaces on the territory of Romania have begun to expand. According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics, in “2008 were 6,308,000 ha of the forest; in 2009, 6,334,000 ha; and in 2010, 6,353,700 ha forest.”²² But even in this situation, the forest specialists have raised an issue, namely, that the growth of the forested surface was “recorded in the evergreen forest, not in the deciduous one which has a protective and effective role in keeping the ecological balance.”²³

Another image of the human abuse upon the forests in Romania is reflected in the study made by the World Wide Fund for Nature, according to which since 1990, “Romania has faced serious problems regarding illegal cutting of trees, especially within the context of restitutions to the former owners and that only 60% of the activities are carried out in accordance with the specific legislation.”²⁴

²⁰ Petru T. Stancioiu și Sorin I. Baldea, “Rețeaua ecologică Natura 2000 in contextul actual al gospodăririi pădurilor din România,” in: *Revista Pădurilor*, București: Editura Regia Națională a Pădurilor – Romsilva și Societatea Progresul Silvic, 2010, nr 1, 37-41, p. 37.

²¹ Parlamentul României, “Codul Silvic al României,” in: *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I, (27 martie 2008), nr. 238, 2-19, p. 2.

²² Institut Național de Statistici, *Anuarul Statistic al României pentru anii 2008-2010*, București, (unpublished document).

²³ Constanța Popescu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 136.

²⁴ World Wide Fund for Nature, Cf. Madalina A. Nae, *Cum dispar padurile?*, posted on May 26, 2009, accessed on 18th september 2021, website: <http://www.ecomagazin.ro/cum-dispar-padurile/>.

2.2 Role of deforestation in increased droughts

Dumitru Chiriac, a member in the National Institute of Economic Research, demonstrates that the drought phenomenon has been present in Romania for more than 100 years. The main cause is deforestation and destruction of the protection forest curtains.²⁵ Today, as a result of the abusive deforestation since 1989 and global warming, the drought phenomenon, perceived as a temporary inability of the water resources to cope with the intake, extended to most of Dobrogea, the eastern side of the Campia Romana (Baraganul), south of Campia Oltenia, south of Podisului Central Moldovenesc, and Delta Dunarii. Of these areas affected by the drought phenomenon, 9 districts have extremely sparse wooded areas compared to the national average and are registered as areas with maximum drought risk (Calarasi - 4,4%, Constanta - 5,0%, Teleorman - 5,1%, Ialomita - 5,8%, Galati - 9,8%, Giurgiu - 10,6%).²⁶

The drought phenomenon, characterized by the progressive warming of the atmosphere and the reduction of rainfall,²⁷ can be felt in agriculture because it depends mostly on climatic conditions.

Looking at the agricultural situation of Romania between 1995-1998, one can realize that this country is dealing with a serious problem because the negative effect of the drought has increased "from 3,900,000 ha, in 1995, to 7,100 ha in the crop of 1998"²⁸,

²⁵ Dumitru Chiriac, Cristina Huma și Ana Bleahu, *Efectele socioeconomice ale secetei și fenomenelor asociate (aridizare, deșertificare) asupra comunităților umane din România*, București: Editura Academia Română, 2004, p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8-9.

²⁷ Cristina Huma și Dumitru Chiriac, "Aspecte globale privind fenomenele de secetă, aridizare și deșertificare," in: *Calitatea Vieții*, 2004, nr. 1-2, 113-121, p. 113.

²⁸ Ion Băcănar, Ion Velcea, *Op. Cit.*, p. 240.

given that “from 14,8 million ha agricultural land of Romania only 8,7 million ha are held by the tillable.”²⁹

As a result of the abusive deforestations which took place also after 1998, the drought does not remain a phenomenon of the past, but acts destructively from year to year, so that the cereal production of Romania between 1998 – 2000 (considered to be the most droughty years for Romania), is halved. Thus, if “in 1998 the cereal production of Romania was of 22,1 million tons, in 2000 it drops to 10,4 million tons, 42 districts being affected,”³⁰ and in “2001 the drought affected 1,9 million ha of crops.”³¹

The reforestation done in Romania after 2007 has also left its mark on the drought phenomenon which “compromised only 1,043 million ha of agricultural crops in 2009, representing 15% of the cultivated tillable surface in that year.”³²

Hence, scientists in Romania, underlining the special role forests play in maintaining the ecological balance and the way forests could resolve the problem of the drought and its negative social and economic implications, stated: “Romania is the only country in Europe in which the woodland is decreasing instead of increasing from year to year.”³³

²⁹ Andrei Canarache, *Utilizarea eficientă a resurselor funciare în agricultură*, București: Editura Ceres, 2001, p. 11.

³⁰ Dumitru Chiriac, Cristina Huma, Ana Bleahu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³² Stefan Blaciotti, “Definirea interesului național prin identificarea capacităților reale de producție agricolă,” in: *Colocviu Strategic*, 2009, nr 11, 1-9, p. 7.

³³ Dumitru Chiriac, Cristina Huma, Ana Bleahu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

2.3 The Role of deforestation for the increased number of floods

While some regions of Romania are seriously affected by the drought phenomenon, authorities in other areas signal, increasingly, the destruction made by flooding as a large quantity of water from rivers or streams overflow over their banks.

Thus, during December 1995 – January 1996, rains exceeded 100 liters on square meters in the superior pools of the Crisul Repede and the Crisul Negru and 300 liters on the square meter at Stana de Vale. This water quantity was amplified by the snow melting and supersaturated soil. High-waters, sudden increases in the water level in a river, were produced. These flooding affected 769 households, 52,214 ha agricultural land, 352 km roads, 199 bridges, and most serious, loss of human life.³⁴

After the rains in June 1998, the flooding and high-waters have affected all hydrographic basins in Transylvania and Northern Moldova, areas well known for the wood-exploitation and processing industry.³⁵ After this event, thousands of houses and tens of thousands ha covered with crops were put underwater, and many people have died because some of the water-highs reached 1,5 m height.³⁶

The decisive quantities of rain and large-scale high-waters also continued in 1999 and 2000, but the damage produced in these years was overshadowed by the storms, pouring rains, and flooding registered in 2001 as a result of the awful drought of 2000. Thus, the rains in June 2001 reached 15 l/mp/24 h in some

³⁴ Ion Băcănar, Ion Velcea, *Op. Cit.*, p. 247.

³⁵ Eugen G. Beldeanu, "Din istoria silviculturii românești: O carte consacrată valorificării lemnului din România, apărută la mijlocul perioadei interbelice," in: *Revista Pădurilor*, București: Editura Regia Națională a Pădurilor – Romsilva și Societatea Progresul Silvic, 2010, nr. 2, 39-43, p. 40.

³⁶ Ion Băcănar, Ion Velcea, *Op. Cit.*, p. 247.

regioncountry areas. This water quantity overreached the critical defense threshold. In the districts of Arges, Dambovita, Prahova, Brasov, Covasna, the water quantity exceeded 40 – 100 l/mp/12 h, the record being reached in Moroieni, of 149 l/mp.³⁷ The greatest loss caused by this flooding was represented by the death of hundreds of people and the injury of another few thousand. Following the floods in 2004, 19 people have died, and material damages of 1 billion euro were registered; those in 2005 have resulted in 76 deaths and material injuries of 2 billion euro; those in 2006 have resulted in 17 deaths material damages of 500 million euro; those in 2007 have resulted in 7 deaths and material damages of 50 million euro; those in 2008 have resulted in 6 deaths and material damages of 150 million euro.³⁸

Seeing the clear image of the disaster that the people and authorities are facing in Romania year after year, one can also realize the existing climatic changes that rise against them, especially in the form of drought and flooding, with their serious social, economic, and ecologic implications. But what part do deforestations have in the intensification of flooding?

The flooding was produced in or near the areas in which forests suffered through time and mostly after 1989. The lack of forests represents a major cause of flooding. Also, the lack of forests contributes to that lack of attenuation of the high-waters and of retention of the alluvium soil in the case of these high-waters. Thus, besides their special role in maintaining the ecological balance, forests also have the role of protector of humans and households. To strengthen these assertions and underline the defining role

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Emil Ciulei, "Cauza majorării inundațiilor: Distrugerea pădurilor," in: *Economistul*, nr. 3157, posted on July 13, 2010, accessed on 18th september 2021, website:<http://www.economistul.ro/cauza-majora-a-inundatiilor-distrugerea-padurilor-a2455/>.

forests have in the attenuation and even the elimination of flooding and drought, scientists stated:

*“Some interventions were forcedly introduced in the surroundings, as has been done with the deforestations in the Oriental Carpathians, on which the running, raffle, and the landslides. The overloading of cliffs with constructions generated special potential factors in terrain degradation, especially in the Sub Carpathians.”*³⁹

So, besides the role of forests in the ecological balance, they even have social importance. They protect people from large quantities of water and their effects. Thus, forests have a unique role in breaking the force of rain, and “the forest floor, acting as a large sponge, absorbs rainfall and prevents run-off and floods.”

3 The contemporary society and the ecological crisis

What does “ecological crisis” mean? Is “ecological crisis” a new phenomenon and what is the root of it? The term “ecology” (from the greek word *oikos* – *household* and *logos* – *discourse, speech*) was coined in 1866 by the German biologist Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, through which he wanted to describe all the different studies for his field of study.⁴⁰ Thus, he proposed the following definition: “Through *oekologie* is understood the totality science about the relationship between organism and environment, which largely includes all the conditions of existence.”⁴¹

Defining the term “ecology”, it is essential to look at the history of Christianity to realize the relation between people and the en-

³⁹ Valeria Velcia, *Geografia fizica a României*, Sibiu: Editura Lucian Blaga, 2001, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Daniel Buxhoeveden and Gayle Woloschak, *Science and the Eastern Orthodox Church*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011, p. 53.

⁴¹ Dominique Lecourt (coord.), *Dicționar de Istoria și Filosofia Stiințelor*, Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005, p. 477.

vironment and when the “ecological crisis” appeared. But to understand it, firstly, it is well to see the relationship of Jewish and Greek people, two cultures that influenced Christian formation, with creation. So, after Adam and Eva did not resist the devil’s temptation, according to the Scripture, they fell into the sin of disobedience. Thus, the relationship between God and the first people, Adam and Eva, has been overshadowed through their disobedience. The people’s behavior was no longer in harmony with God and creation and as a result the ground yields for them “thorns and thistles...” (Genesis 3:18). However, in the history of the Jewish people can be observed that they had the consciousness about God as Creator for all: “... O Lord endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands” (Psalm 138:8).

In ancient Greece, people generally did not think that creation has not been made by God. They thought that the world had enough energy to exist eternally. The order of the world is very beautiful, and it is like a fire that burns forever because the world is not static but continuously moving.

From these two cultures, Christianity believes that creation is beautiful, in a perfect harmony, but only in relation to its Creator, God: “all the ancient liturgies involve sanctification of matter and of time.”⁴² During the first three centuries, the Christian world was troubled by Gnosticism’s theory under which matter is evil, God is not the Creator of cosmos, and his providence does not exist. Further, Christian history encountered the Enlightenment from the 17th century to the 19th century that promotes the idea that creation is for rational beings and they can exploit it.

The “ecological crisis,” therefore, has existed since the Adam and Eva’s fall until today, where it is experienced on a different level. As seen in the way people conceive of the relationship between creation-God-human beings. Thus, the transition from one epoch

⁴² John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and The World*, New York: T&T Clark International, 2011, p. 151.

to another has brought sweeping shifts in the people's thinking, replacing spiritual values with material values, God with human beings who try to self-deify. People want to have the supreme power to dominate the whole creation outside of a relationship with God.

Thus, today's people often assert: "I do not care about what is going to happen to the material world. I am the center of the world. I am here in order to please and satisfy myself, and the world is there to satisfy me."⁴³ They do not think in terms of love toward God, creation, and their neighbors but seek to fulfill all their pleasure and to quench their desire for power that becomes without end. So, they eternally divided God of his creation, saying that God created the world but is not present in it.

People were taking God out of creation; they destroy the theocentric or Christocentric character of creation under which all creation finds its goal of existence in God: "... as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). They adopt egocentricity under which the people are the measure of all created things, and the creation has value to the extent that it fulfills their needs. Thus, human beings, in their quality of God's image on the earth, had to strive for power and domination in their attempt to replace God. But what is implied by "domination," and how is its field extended?

To maintain their disparaging behavior upon creation, some modern people say that the right of dominion is a gift given by God to people (Genesis 1:28). The truth is that the word "dominion" is kept, but the original meaning of it and how the modern people understand it is very different. God said to Adam and Eva

⁴³ Idem, "Man the Priest of Creation – A Response to the Ecological Problem," in: Andrew Walker and Costa Carras (eds.), *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World*, Great Britain: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996, 178-188, p. 187.

to have dominion in order “to till” and “to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Today humanity sees in domination its own right to bring “all the benefits without limits or constraints.”⁴⁴ And this people’s domination is not reduced only to nature but even over their neighbors, who are not seen as persons for dialog anymore but as numbers. This becomes very clear when the people reduce the economic power of their neighbors, “the gap between poverty and wealth continues to widen”⁴⁵, and inequalities between them becomes more and more evident. Thus is implied a real social concern.

So, of the facts described above it can be distinguished that ecological crisis is only a result of a crisis at all levels of existence: spiritual, ethical, social, scientific, political through the attitude of governments for the contemporary situation. Therefore, the ecological crisis is a “global problem concerning all human beings regardless of the part of the world or the social class to which they belong, and a problem that has to do not simply with the well-being but with (...) creation as a whole.”⁴⁶

4 Creation as a gift of God’s love for human beings

In the context where the idea of consumerism and ecological imbalance implemented, especially by forest cutting, became more and more obvious, the Orthodox Church felt the need to get involved and confess the value of creation and its relation to humans and God.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Metropolitan Emanuel of France, “Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe – an Opening Speech,” in: PeterPavlovic (ed.), *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe. Call for Climate Justice*, Brussels: Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches, 2011, 15-17, p. 15.

⁴⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and The World...*, p. 143.

The created world is a mystery, and according to the Bible, the world - "all things visible and invisible" - was made through God's free will. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). And the world has not been created from a preexistent matter which existed once with God, as Gnosticism believed, but it has been created out of nothing, from non-existence to existence.

Saint Basil the Great, in order to explain more clearly the three Persons of the Triune God, said that the people should understand in creation the original cause of the Father as a founding cause, the cause of the Son as a creative one, and the cause of the Holy Spirit as an implementing one.⁴⁷ He implies that the Persons of the Holy Trinity have participated in their own and personal mode but at the same time together. God the Father is the Maker of heaven and earth, but He works through his Son ("... all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3)). He leads matter toward eternal existence through the Holy Spirit who "was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

Because creation has a beginning and it has been made "out of nothing," it is not from eternity or "self-sufficient and it is not independent because in the created world itself there is no foundation, no basis for genesis and being."⁴⁸ So, it stays in existence only in relation with a personal God who manifests his love upon the creation. The presence of God's love in creation leads us to the idea that the world has not been created from an inner necessity of Creator. Creation is not a sign of lack; it is an expression of the profusion of God's love that is not a selfish love. This love

⁴⁷ St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Anderson David, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, vol. 3, Belmont: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976, p. 45.

creates a real dialog between Creator and creatures which involves creation as a space where the meeting between transcendence and immanence, sensible and intelligible, takes place. Therefore, the material world can be seen as a gift of a Person: "...also that it is God's gift to human beings that each of them should eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil" (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

God has created the material world out of his love for human persons as free partners of dialog with him so that all creatures may arrive at the full communion with him because God is "goodness who gathers all scattered creatures, as the beginner and unifying Divinity; all creatures wish him as a final target."⁴⁹ Creation, being God's gift, a sensitive environment of dialog between God and people, acquires the potential of eternity by the fact that God's Spirit continuously sustains it.

But why is so important to perceive creation as a gift? When creation is regarded as a gift, the people's knowledge will not remain only to the visible objects, and creation will not become an idol. If creation is purely reduced to immanence, it will be in danger of extinction because it cannot exist without its Creator.

The idea of gift usually points to the existence of a Giver; creatures naturally witness about their Creator. Then the idolatrous selfishness is replaced by the experience of love that lifts the involved subjects to eternal communion. Therefore, in the virtue of the gift's idea, creation gains its own transparency through which it makes its Giver present into, not in a pantheistic manner (Giver is identified, confused with its gift), but in his care of it (divine providence): "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have

⁴⁹ Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, București: Editura Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2005, p. 145.

been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

On this point, nature's existence can be seen as another way of seeing God, His power, and providential activity for human beings. Thus, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Orthodox theologian and mystic writer who lived between the years 580-662, said: "if we perceive what does not appear by means of what does, then much more will visible things be understood by means of invisible by those who advance in spiritual contemplation."⁵⁰ Creation becomes an icon of its Giver, witnessing and leading people who try to see the purpose of its existence through their spiritual eyes toward higher and higher targets without ceasing.

Therefore, creation seen as a gift can remain in existence only in communion with its Giver, Trinitarian God. Outside of this relationship, this communion of love, creation is threatened by death, by its "return to nothing."⁵¹

Why does creation deserve so much attention? What is the value of creation? Creation being made by the Trinitarian God is good. Creation being a unity of divine origin can be considered as good, but not intrinsically good. Thus, the real value of creation is reflected through its objective: to be the home for living beings and the context for God's Incarnation and humankind's deification. But this creation's purpose is closely related by human beings' intention, to their desire to grow up spiritually, to dialog with God, seeing creation as a bridge between them, between the uncreated and the creation. Thus the importance of the human being becomes crucial for the return of gift to its Giver, the Trinitarian God.

⁵⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor Cf. George Berthold: *Maximus Confessor: selected writings*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985, p. 189.

⁵¹ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, "Creation Theology: An Orthodox perspective," in: Lukas Vischer (ed.), *Listening to Creation Groaning*, Geneva: Centre International Reforme John Knox, 2004, 90-104, p. 96.

Thus, the Orthodox Church proposes Eucharistic and ascetic ethos within the contemporary society.

These aspects of the Orthodox Tradition have to reconnect people with God. Even though the Eucharistic and ascetic ethos are practiced within the Church, people should become more conscious about them. This consciousness among Romanian Orthodox people, and perhaps the rest of the world, can represent a step forward for the whole creation, and the Church should witness that. Therefore, humanity needs a renewed asceticism for the sake of creation. And it is possible through Liturgy where all the people are together as one body in relation with God. Thus this is a task for people to be conscious of and a task for Church to witness it.

5 Conclusions

Thus, the Orthodox Church, with an eloquent theology about the relationship between people, about creation, with theological approaches to humanity's relationship with the natural environment and with spiritual aspects of the problem, has a great role in reforestation. Hence, the need for more communication is felt, an open dialog between Orthodox Church and the state authorities. The Orthodox Church is not to be identified with any ecological movement, party, or organization, but being a Church, constitutes a presence and a witness to a new mode of existence concerning the human being's relationship with God, with one another, and with nature.

Thus, the Orthodox Church proposes a Eucharistic and ascetic ethos within contemporary society. These aspects of the Orthodox Tradition have to reconnect people with God. It is possible through Liturgy where all the people are together as one body in relation to God. At the same time, even if ecological education becomes a study discipline in the school, this branch needs much more attention from the Priests of the Church, who often enjoy a

greater authority in relation to human persons. Another vision for the future can be constituted from the fact that the Church helps young people start different programs with actions in the environment to keep it.

In light of this reality where the ecological crisis threatens the life of people more and more, each Church should engage in projects or local initiatives which lead to the enhancement of all creation. Each Church is requested to undertake projects, be aware of human persons, encourage alternative energy, water conservation, and organize recycling programs.

Also, the Orthodox Church can open a dialog with scientists so the Church and scientists can enrich each other. The Church has to take the exact data about the situation and science to apply spirituality ecologically.

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