

THE KEYNOTE DIALOGUE: CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATIONS AND ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS¹

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EASTERN-CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION AND ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

I. Ecology and Ontology

II. Ecology and Foundations of Christianity

III. Ecology and Ascesis

To put it briefly, the subject of our dialogue is *Christianity and Ecology*. It is a big subject, and, to my mind, it includes two principal themes, one of which is more theoretical and another more practical. The first theme is *Ecology and the Foundations of Christianity*. These foundations are theological, but also philosophical, and for this reason it is also the theme: *Ecology and Basic Structures of Being*, or else *Ecology and Ontology*. The discussion of this theme must give us answers to the questions: *Is there such thing as ecological consciousness in Christianity? And if it is, then of what kind this consciousness is?* Then the second, practical theme must provide answers to the further questions: *How functions this Christian ecological consciousness? What does it do, which practices and strategies does it organize?* Accordingly, the title of this theme could be *Ecology and Practices of Christian Life*.

In this dialogue I represent the Eastern-Christian civilization and hence my part is to consider practices of Eastern Christianity. The specific distinction of the Eastern-Christian tradition is that it has the spiritual core, a certain mystical and ascetic practice called hesychasm, which developed from the 4th c. and is still living and active today. This practice cultivates a special kind of spiritual experience, the experience of direct personal communion with Christ and union with Him in His Energies. For Eastern-Orthodox Christians the goal and destination of Christian life is the acquirement of such experience, and for this reason hesychast practice is recognized firmly to be the true core of Orthodox spirituality. (Such structure of religious tradition is usual for religions of the East, where such religions as, for example, Taoism and Buddhism are also based on certain spiritual, i.e. mystical and ascetical practices.) Thus if we are interested in ecological aspects of the life of Eastern Orthodoxy, we must consider the theme *Ecology and Ascesis*, and more specially, *Ecology and Hesychasm*. But first let us discuss the most general theme.

I. Ecology and Ontology

By definition, ecological consciousness is concentrated on the relations of the man and the mankind to the environment and the world of nature that is to material reality. It is not evident that it has any connection with such problems as problems of theology or problems of ontological structure of reality. Thus the first task in developing our theme is to discover and demonstrate this connection. It can be done in many ways, but the most profound philosophical consideration is undoubtedly provided by the analysis of Heidegger in his very well-known work "The Question concerning Technology" (1949). This analysis is not exactly within the context of Christian thought (sticking more to ancient Greek philosophy), but the logical and conceptual scheme of Heidegger's arguments is so general that it is essentially valid in our context too. One must add that nowhere Heidegger speaks directly about ecology, and in my discussion of the ecological problem I translate his considerations into the explicit ecological discourse.

The key element for the connection of ecology and ontology is the phenomenon of technology, which has strong ties to both spheres. Heidegger argues that since the Enlightenment

¹ The text for the opening dialogue at the Songshan Forum "Humanistic Spirit and Ecological Consciousness". Songshan, Dengfeng, China, September 2013.

époque technology was gradually changing its essence, and the character of this change proves that man was losing more and more his openness to being (to the encounter with God, in religious discourse). It means that modern technology produces cardinal ontological effect, it leads to the destruction of the fundamental relation Man – Being or Man – God. On the other hand, as we all know, modern technology brings about big negative ecological effects. It causes growing damage and harm to the environment, and it is firmly recognized now that technology is the main factor generating ecological crises and catastrophes. In this way, the *connection of ecology and ontology via technology* is established, and we have to understand this connection in order to find solutions of present ecological problems.

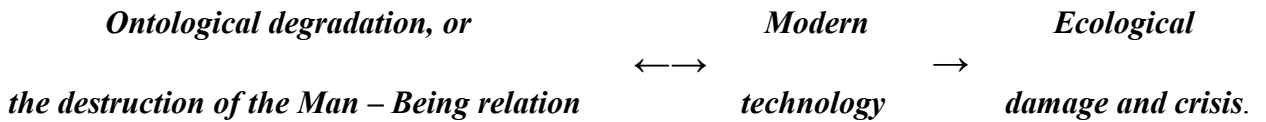
The relation of technology to ecology is rather simple and, so to say, directly visible. Technology constitutes the sphere of industrial production and extraction of natural resources, and we all see how the unrestricted growth of this sphere spoils the environment and makes the ecological situation worse and worse. (Though ecological crises can have other causes and they happened in ancient non-technogenic civilizations as well.) So let us turn to the other relation, that of technology and ontology. Its study will open to us religious and anthropological connections of technology, and then in a roundabout way we shall be able to understand important religious and anthropological aspects of ecological problems.

According to Heidegger, technology, which was, naturally, always present in the life of mankind, took a bad course in its development starting with the Post-Renaissance and Cartesian époque. This course included the change of its essence, that is its relation to the fundamental principles of Truth and Being. Originally, technology was close in its essence to *techne*, the specific union of technical and artistic skill cultivated in ancient Greece. *Techne* had a special value. In accordance with the etymology of the Greek *aletheia*, truth is interpreted by Heidegger as openness or unconcealedness, and *techne* is the most adequate way for man and man's mode of being, being-there, to overcome their initial state of concealedness or hiddenness opposite to truth, and to approach unconcealedness and achieve complete openness to being. Now, when technology breaks its closeness to *techne*, its new essence corresponds to industrial production. By Heidegger, in such production man and his world, the real, also overcome their state of concealedness, performing disclosure of the concealed. The disclosure of the concealed is the principal task or "mission" of man and technology, like *techne*, performs this mission as well. It means that Heidegger does not condemn or demonize technology as such, in its very principle. But now, after having changed its essence from that of *techne* to that of production, modern technology performs the mission of disclosure of the concealed in a different way, which is the worst possible and the most risky way. In the framework or mode of *techne* esthetical and harmonious disclosure of the concealed takes place, which means the actualization of the nature of that real, which was concealed, in all dimensions of this nature. In contrast to it, in the framework or mode of production disclosure of the concealed means turning the latter into a fixed stock, something that is ready to a certain functional use; and eventually man begins to conceive himself as also a fixed stock. Obviously, in this way he does not achieve openness to being, on the contrary, he comes nearer to eliminating his relation to being entirely. But such elimination represents cardinal change in the ontological structure of reality: by Heidegger, man and being cannot be separated, they are entrusted to each other, and if the relation of man to being comes near to elimination, this «forgetting of being» (Heidegger's key notion) changes the ontological situation in a radical way. In its character, this change must be considered as *ontological degradation drawing near to ontological collapse* because it means the approach to death of man as such.

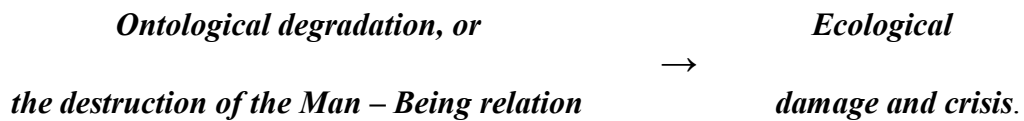
Thus modern technology damages the relation of man to being and leads to ontological degradation. One can notice that the inverse is true too. The loosening, deterioration and destruction of the fundamental relation of man to being is a general characteristic of global anthropological and religious situation in Modern Age. Such destruction has multiple implications in all spheres, and, in particular, it implies that man's work of disclosure of the concealed changes its character from that of *techne* to that of production, which corresponds to

modern technology. In other words, ontological degradation that is the destruction of the relation of man to being, is a broad process, one of aspects or consequences of which is the formation of modern technology. And it means that ontological degradation and the phenomenon of modern technology mutually imply each other; they are two key factors of the development of civilization and culture in Modern Age.

Summing up, we can represent the obtained conclusions about the relations between ecology, ontology and technology in a diagrammatic form:



Obviously, this scheme implies also the direct relationship between ecology and ontology:



In a sense, this relationship is the main result of all our consideration. It shows that the fundamental relations Man – Being and Man – Nature/Environment are tied together in such a way that the latter is determined by the former. Expansion of technology is the direct and visible source of modern ecological troubles, but beyond this source we discover more profound sources in the changing ontological situation, in which the gradual loss of the relation of man to being takes place. In other words, contemporary ecological problems have ontological roots in the Man – Being relation.

Now we see that our analysis has an important special feature. Reconstructing the connection between ecology and ontology, we found that there are some specific negative and dangerous phenomena in both spheres and, as a consequence, the connection that we established is, more precisely, the *connection between ontological and ecological dangers*. This fact makes us to continue the analysis and ask the question, how to deal with these dangers. Can one find strategies to overcome them? The consideration on the ontological level does not formulate recipes for practical action, and Heidegger states only that first of all man must identify and recognize the danger as such, and then he will be able to make the decisive turn (the turn is a special Heideggerian concept, *die Kehre*), in which he will restore instantly and fully his relation to being and due to this the danger will turn to salvation. No ways and means for the turn are pointed out, however. But the relation of man to being is not only ontological, it has religious and anthropological dimensions as well. Thus there are also religious and anthropological roots of ecological problems. Our next task is to disclose and describe them and, doing this, we shall be able to come more closely to strategies of overcoming ecological and other dangers for modern world.

II. Ecology and the Foundations of Christianity

What has Christianity to say about ecology? Of course, ecology is a relatively new word² and we cannot expect to find some ecological position expressed directly in the traditional Christian teaching, be it in Scripture or Church dogmas or works of the Church fathers. However, such position is present there in the implicit form of statements concerning the relation of man to nature and the environment, to all the world of creation. The principal of them are well-known and much discussed, and in modern times, when ecological movement becomes more and more active, the viewpoint was often expressed that the Christian position in ecology is

² Invented by E. Heckel in 1866.

radical anthropocentrism, which justifies the egoistic subjugation and exploitation of the environment by man, and so it is Christianity or may be, Judeo-Christian tradition that is in the origin of modern ecological crisis. This viewpoint cannot be disregarded: it remains rather influential and, what is more important, it contains indisputable elements of truth. Yes, the Judeo-Christian, or biblical worldview is openly anthropocentric. Let us sum up very briefly the main theses of biblical anthropocentrism.

According to the Old Testament, man is created “in the image and after the likeness” of God (Gen 1,26); man is placed to have supremacy over all the world beings (Gen 1,28); and man enters into a special personal relationship with God, “makes a covenant” with God. Relations of man, God and world are outlined here quite precisely:

1) Man forms an ontological unity with the world, as a “creature”, a created being, who is as such separated from uncreated, Divine being by an ontological distance and split;

2) Although man is united with the world, he is singled out in it, holds the central and leading position in it, and has power over it, given by God;

3) Although man is separated from God, he keeps a mutual spiritual and existential connection with Him, and this connection of God and man is a decisive factor in the destiny not just of man, but of all created being.

The anthropocentrism of this system of relations is obvious, but it is important to find out exactly, what kind of anthropocentrism it is. Anthropocentrism as such states that man holds the central position in the world, but there are very different kinds of the central position. It is not only the position of an exploiting despot, like a master among slaves, but also the position of a captain on a boat, of a guide among wayfarers, of a doctor among patients, or else of a priest during the divine service. Of all these kinds, we shall show that it is the last one, the role of a priest, that is the closest to the Christian anthropocentrism. The Christian attitude combines the statement of a special and singular position of man with the statement of a common destiny of the entire creation, and this combination actually amounts to the statement of *man's responsibility* for this common destiny.

The ancient idea of man as the Microcosmos containing all the basic elements of the world as the Macrocosmos is profoundly reassessed in Christianity, it is converted from the static to the dynamic mode so that man is now conceived not as some special part of created being, but as its centre, collecting focus and organizing principle, which must secure its all-out connectedness and coherence. It means not man's unlimited power over the world, but man's mission and duty in the world, and, what is most important, man is not able to fulfill this mission on his own, by his own will only. Christian anthropocentrism is not at all a supreme and independent principle, in the Christian view of reality it is inseparable from and subordinate to higher principles, which are theocentrism and Christocentrism. These principles are clearly seen from the last of the three basic theses formulated above. The constitution of man and destiny of the world are determined not so much by man's relation to the world and nature as by man's relation to God (the theocentrism), and this relation is actualized in man's striving to and union with Christ (the Christocentrism). It means that the Man – God relation is the basic structural paradigm or ontological principle, and its role in Christian discourse is similar to some extent to the role of the Man – Being relation in ontology of the heideggerian type. In accordance with this paradigm, existence of the world represents as a process or “history” or “drama” of created being, which includes four formative ontological events:

Creation – Fall – Incarnation – Deification (union with God).

Now, what is exactly man's role in this drama and, more precisely, in its last act, after the Incarnation of Jesus Christ? By the thesis 1 above, all created being, including man, forms an ontological unity and so has common ontological status and common destiny concerning this status. Hence it follows that the union with God called the deification (*theosis*, in Greek) is a global principle, which conveys the destination not only of the individual man, but also of the created world as a whole or the Macrocosmos. By virtue of the Christocentrism principle, the advancement or the ascent to the deification, being the actualization of the Man – God relation,

means man's ascent to the union with Christ, the "Son of man", and so it is man's exclusive mission. However, at the same time it must embrace eventually all the Macrocosmos. Thus we conclude that the advancement to the deification includes a certain *cosmic dimension*.

What is the content of this dimension? In the Eastern-Christian spiritual tradition man's union with Christ is described as the complete union of all energies of the human being with Divine Energies, and in this union Divine Energies perform the transfiguration of the human being, its transformation or transcension into Divine being. Evidently, the presence of the cosmic dimension of the deification demands that this transfiguration of the human being obtained its continuation and completion in the transfiguration of the world and created being as a whole. However, the transfiguration of the man is performed by God's grace that is by Divine Energies, and hence the transfiguration of the world can be performed only by these Energies as well. Next, it is only the human person who can acquire Divine Energies, and this implies that the transfiguration of the world can be performed exclusively by means of the human being: he/she must acquire Divine Energies and acting in the world transmit these Energies into the world. And we see clearly that such order of the transfiguration of the world is nothing but the *liturgical order*. In the liturgy the priest implementing his charismatic power performs sacral rites, in which the gifts of God's grace are transmitted to the community of believers; and for the transfiguration of the world the man should perform such actions, in which Divine transfiguring energies are transmitted into the world. It is these actions of the man in the world, similar to the actions of the priest in the liturgy, that form up the cosmic dimension of man's deification. Thus we see that the necessary cosmic continuation and completion of the deification can be interpreted as a kind of *cosmic liturgy*. The ideas leading to the notion of cosmic liturgy were developed by the great Orthodox theologian st. Maximus the Confessor (7th c.) whose theological and ascetical synthesis "interprets the existence of the created world as a liturgic rite"³, by the words of the contemporary Roman Catholic scholar Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Now we can come back to ecology. We see that the foundations of Christianity correspond to the principles of the theocentrism and Christocentrism, and these principles imply the anthropocentrism in the version, which presents man as the performer of "cosmic liturgy". In other words, the foundations of Christianity do imply a certain attitude of man with respect to nature and the environment, that is to say a certain ecological position. This position amounts basically to man's acceptance of the mission of the transfiguration of the environment and all nature, the mission, which is to be fulfilled by means of acquiring Divine Energies and transmitting them into the world. In the next section, discussing Christian asceticism, we shall see, what this position implies on practical level. But we can already say right now that it has nothing to do with the egoistic exploitation of the environment and the infliction of damage upon it. Intuitively, Christian consciousness connects the transfiguration of created being with the paradigm or mythologem of a blissful and harmonious state of the world, which preceded the Fall (ontologically, not chronologically). Bringing the environment nearer to such a state is similar to what Heidegger calls disclosure of the concealed in the mode of *techne*, and is opposite to its disclosure in the mode of production, which corresponds to modern technology and inflicts ecological damage and crisis. In some aspects, the idea of cosmic liturgy can be considered as a kind of the Christian generalization of the Greek idea of *techne* (at least, in its heideggerian interpretation), and both these ideas mean such practices that are oriented to ecological harmony.

Thus we see that the views ascribing to Christianity the attitudes, which caused modern ecological crisis, are not correct. Their emergence and popularity became possible because the relation Man – Nature/Environment is not the central one in Christianity and it was traditionally relegated to the background in Christian teaching and thought. In reality, as we have already said in Section I, direct causes of ecological crisis lie in modern technology, in the uncontrolled growth of its sphere. In Section I we have also shown, following Heidegger, that the

³ H.U. von Balthasar. *Liturgie cosmique*. Paris, 1947. P.16.

phenomenon of modern technology is rooted in the “forgetting of being”, in the effacement of man’s relation to being. But such forgetting and effacement are in no way inherent in Christianity, on the contrary, they are principal ontological properties of the secularized view of reality, which replaced Christian doctrine and became dominant in the West in modern times. Hence it follows that *modern technology and ecological crisis are not fruits of Christian civilization, they were brought forth by secularized, or post-Christian civilization.*

As for Christianity, its general positions are directed to ecological harmony, as we have shown. What is more, during its long history its practices accumulated vast experience, which can be used for dealing with ecological problems and correcting ecological situation. Especially close to ecology are ascetical practices, and so we devote our last section to ecological aspects of Christian asceticism.

III. Ecology and Ascesis

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Eastern Christianity pays special attention to asceticism. It developed mystical and ascetic tradition called hesychasm, which is recognized as the true core of Eastern-Orthodox spirituality. For this reason, Eastern Christian ecological positions find their most direct and authentic expression in hesychast tradition. *It is in hesychasm, in the first place, that Eastern Christian ecological consciousness is to be found.* Moreover, ascetical tradition, being practical tradition throughout, accumulates rich practical experience and elaborates practical ways and means, how to deal with ecological problems. Thus we should examine, what kind of the relationship between human beings and their environment was cultivated in Eastern-Orthodox asceticism, and there is a good chance that we shall find in this relationship some new ideas and resources for overcoming the present ecological crisis. Undoubtedly, one important source of such resources is the experience of the monastic community on the Holy Mount Athos (Greece). Here we have the unique case of the community, which successfully achieved the harmonic balance in its coexistence with its environment, and preserved this balance safely during thousand years, staying on the same restricted territory, mountainous and not fertile, without any expansion or any signs of the ecological crisis.

As said above, Christianity was and still is often accused in justifying brutal anthropocentric attitudes with respect to nature and the environment. In fact, the sharpest accusations of such kind were always directed against monasticism and asceticism. It was habitual in the past to accuse ascetic and monastic traditions by claiming that they are concentrated exclusively on man’s personal salvation and inner world, and are completely indifferent to surrounding people and even more so to the environment. However, such accusations were based on misunderstanding and prejudice. In reality, ascetic spirituality always stated quite opposite motives and attitudes with respect to nature and especially to all living creatures, all forms of life. One text of the ancient hesychast literature, which was very popular and much loved in Russia, presents a striking expression of these motives.

The *Word 48* of the famous hesychast teacher St. Isaac the Syrian (7th c.) connects closely the ecological theme with basic elements of hesychast practice. It is called “On the Perfection of all the Way”, that is of all Christian life, and it states that this perfection includes “three main things: repentance, purity and the improvement of oneself”. And this is how the central of these things, purity, is described: “What is purity? To put it shortly, it is the heart that loves all created nature... And what is loving heart? It is the heart, which is burned with affection to all created nature, to humans, birds, animals, demons and all creature. When the man remembers them or looks at them, his eyes shed tears because of the great and strong compassion, which seizes his heart. And his heart fills with tenderness so that he cannot bear or hear or see any harm or any small sorrow suffered by creatures. And because of this he prays each hour also for those who are wordless, and for reptiles he also prays with the great compassion”⁴. We can clearly see that

⁴ Abba Isaac the Syrian. *Ascetic Words*. Moscow, 1993. Pp.205-206. (In Russian.)

this surprising and so emotional text presents an integral man's position with respect to his environment and all nature, and this is the position of limitless love and care, infinite compassion, which embraces with prayer all the creation, including demons and reptiles. Here the "loving heart" described as the burning of man's heart with affection to all creation can be considered as a special and important concept. In fact, it could even be used as the cornerstone for Christian ecological ethics. A particular prayer for reptiles is also meaningful and not rhetorical element since in Byzantium and Near East reptiles or snakes are analogues of wolves in our northern lands, the most dangerous and harmful animals, so that the prayer for them expresses the relation corresponding not to the anthropocentrism, which practices rude intrusions into the environment, but to the ecologism, which cares about the preservation of the latter.

In its content and spirit, this text is not isolated, but quite typical in hesychast literature. The same ecological motives abound in so called *Apophthegmata Patrum*, ancient collections of stories about the Desert Fathers, the first monks of the 4th – 6th cc. who lived in deserts of Egypt and Palestine. There are plenty of stories there about monks who mourned over the death of birds, lived friendly with wild animals, etc. Such stories abound also in Russian monastic and hagiographic literature. And we can be sure that they convey not some stylized ancient legends, but living reality of hesychasm inherent in it in all periods. The data on Russian asceticism of the 15th c. include not just a "story", but quite sizeable "Constitution of Dositheos", the set of rules of life for the Talabians, inhabitants of the Talab islands on the Pskov Lake in North-Western Russia. This constitution composed by the monk Dositheos of the Upper Island included detailed rules of the preservation of natural systems in the Talab islands. It was zealously followed by the Talabians during several centuries, and st. Dositheos was called in one of modern publications the "ecologist of the 15th c.". In quite recent time the painter Constantin Korovin described in his memoirs a very colorful tradition, which existed in one of Russian monasteries in the Far North, beyond the Polar Circle. After the endless polar night, the event of the first sunrise was greeted in the court of the monastery not only by its monks, but also by all the community of eight bears who lived nearby in the forest. The head of the monastery was telling to the painter about it as follows: "The bears... they are free forest beasts, as big as mountains... But they come here to us sometimes... See this big bench by the wall? We all sit on this bench, after the winter and night the monks wait for the first apparition of the sun... And the bears, they are also sitting next to us and looking to the sky. When the sun rises above that mount, we chant the prayer. And the bears, they also start purring, they mean that they are also glad to see the sun. Yes, they are wild beasts, but they understand".

Thus we find that the hesychast principle of the purity of the heart and of the path in one of its important aspects represents an ecological principle. And the ancient hesychast text unexpectedly turns out to be a genuine *manifesto of ecological consciousness*, which appeared about one and half thousand years before the emergence of the ecological movement in the Western secularized world.

The history of this manifesto is closely connected with the Holy Mount Athos and Russia. During the Hesychast Renaissance in Byzantium, in 1389 the athonite monk Gabriel, the future Metropolitan Gregory Tsamblak, the prominent champion of hesychasm in Balkans, has made the Serbian manuscript of the "Words" of st. Isaac the Syrian. The manuscript remained at the library of the Great Lavra monastery until the 19th c., when it was taken to Russia, to the famous Optina Pustyn monastery, one of the main Russian hesychast centers. Then there, in Optina, the Russian translation of the "Words" made by st. Paisius Velichkovsky, the great teacher of hesychasm, was published, and that's how the theme of the Eastern-Christian ecologism begins its life in Russian culture. This theme was especially close to Dostoevsky whose last and most famous novel, *Karamazov Brothers*, is thoroughly penetrated by the spirit of hesychasm and Optina Pustyn. As for the Mount Athos, ecological consciousness was always dominant there. The attitude to the environment and to all the creation, which is expressed by st. Isaac the Syrian, was the usual athonite attitude, and today, as always it was, there are monks on the Holy Mount who feel sorry for snakes and never took away any snake's life. In the ascetic labours of our

contemporary st. elder Silouan of Athos, the Eastern-Christian ecologism obtains some new motives, new and profound development. In the last years of his life, st. Silouan especially concentrates his spiritual work and his prayer on the destiny of all the creation. He elaborates special forms of prayer to this end. As his disciple higoumenos Sophrony (Sakharov) writes, “In such prayer the heart lives with the sufferings of all the world... the soul in the Holy Spirit contemplates all the world and embraces it with its love”⁵. The human being is elevated here to the state that st. Silouan called “pain of the heart for all Universe”. Evidently, the attitude to nature and the environment corresponding to such a state includes the ecological attitude of careful preservation of the environment. But this attitude is exceeded here since ecological tasks are now integrated into much wider spiritual and cosmic context, the context of salvation and transfiguration of all created being by the love of Christ.

Thus we find that Christian ascetic spirituality developed its own approach to environmental problems and, even more, its own kind of ecological consciousness, which connects the ecological problem with the goal of Christian life, the ascent to the union with God. In order to understand the specific character of this consciousness, one must notice the inner affinity of the notions “asceticism” and “ecology”. Indeed, they have much in common in their sense. Ecology not only studies the relations of organisms and populations with their environment, but it also points out ways and means, how to overcome dangerous and harmful phenomena in these relations and reach harmony in them. As for asceticism, it deals with the inner world of the man and also tries to overcome some harmful phenomena, the passions, in order to reach harmonious order in this world. Thus asceticism and ecology are close and similar. *Asceticism can be considered as ecology of the soul, ecology of the inner world, while ecology, in its turn, can be considered as asceticism with respect to nature, the outer world.* This parallel can be illustrated by many concrete examples. The principle of the ecological balance in the world of nature can be likened to the ascetic principle of quietness, hesychia, which demands perfect balance in the inner world; ascetic principle of continence and temperance has the obvious parallel in ecological principles of the protection and preservation of natural resources, and so on.

However, in order to understand completely this profound affinity, we must also take into account the differences between these phenomena. They are no less profound. In the section II we pointed out that in the Eastern Christian tradition, the actualization of the fundamental Man – God relation, in which man’s constitution is formed-up, is conceived as the ascent to the deification (*theosis*). But *theosis* is the concept with a special role in Eastern-Christian discourse, it is a concept with the double nature: it is not only theological, but also ascetical category, signifying the final goal of hesychast practice. Hence it follows that this practice realizes the ascent to the union with God; the higher steps of this ascent include the first real signs of the transfiguration of the human being as a whole, the transformation of the mode of being of human person. On the other hand, the aims of ecology belong completely to the material and natural world, they refer to its protection and its safe existence. It means that both phenomena are of different character and essence. Asceticism is not only “inner ecology”, but also “ontological” or “transcendent” ecology, and its goal is not only well-balanced and harmonious arrangement of the inner world and the human being as a whole, but also their ascent to another mode of being, Divine being.

For this reason, the true relationship of asceticism and ecology is not simply a parallel, according to which they represent similar phenomena belonging to different plans of reality, respectively, inner and outer. In the section II we discovered that the advancement to *theosis* is not restricted to man’s inner world or even to the human being as a whole, but includes a cosmic dimension, and the content of this dimension can be interpreted as a “cosmic liturgy”. Now we take into account that *theosis* is also an ascetical category, the goal of hesychast practice, and we

⁵ Hieromonk Sophrony. The Elder Silouan. His Life and Teaching. Moscow, 1991. Pp.47, 93. (In Russian.)

draw the conclusion that the cosmic dimension and the cosmic liturgy are also characteristics of hesychast ascesis. It means that in hesychasm, the purely anthropological practice dealing with the Microcosmos should obtain its continuation and completion in some practices dealing with the Macrocosmos, with the environment and nature. In other words, the cosmic liturgy, which should complete hesychast ascesis, includes a certain order of man's relationship with his environment, that is to say a certain ecological strategy.

In the preceding section we pointed out some general features of this strategy, and the direct connection of the cosmic liturgy with hesychast practice makes it possible to present it in a more detailed way. Its specific distinction is the inseparable connection between usual, empirical ecology and spiritual ecology, the principles of which are determined by ascetical practice. Here all the positions of man with respect to his environment are formed up in the ascetical perspective and are based on the foundations of hesychast spirituality. The cosmic liturgy implies a new image of ecology: ecology as a certain new *techne*, in the heideggerian sense, "ontological" or "extended" or "integral" ecology, which embraces both ecology of the environment and ecology of man's inner world. And in the framework of this extended ecology, new possibilities of overcoming the ecological crisis open up, and new ecological strategies can be formulated. The present-day situation provides more and more proofs to the fact that the roots of the crisis are in spiritual and anthropological dimensions. "What we call the crisis of the environment is in reality the crisis in the human heart", – says the contemporary Orthodox theologian Metropolitan Callistos (Ware). These words show to us that the resolution of the ecological crisis cannot be found in the sphere of technological, political or economical measures, it demands necessarily and in the first place the overcoming of the "crisis in the human heart", the *union of ecology and ascesis*.

Modern discussions of hesychast and athonite spiritual tradition stress more and more that this tradition possesses huge and unexhausted *healing potential*. The contemporary athonite monk, the higoumenos Sophrony (quoted above) said that the Mount Athos is a big hospital. It is the traditional monastic view of spiritual practice, and I demonstrate in my texts that in the modern world hesychast ascesis continues to serve as the unique school of the personhood and strategy of socialization. Now we see that the healing potential of ascesis can be also used for other acute problems of the contemporary world. Hesychast spirituality contains the principles of its own authentic relation to nature and environment, the principles of the *Orthodox ecologism*, and modern man can use these principles in order to correct his relationship with the environment, to reach harmony in this relationship and to avoid ecological crises and catastrophes. The valuable example of the harmonious relationship is provided by the experience of the athonite ascesis: the hesychast way of life, *ho bios hesychastos*, very efficiently secured ecological harmony and balance on all the Athos peninsula during many centuries. And we can say that nowadays the relation of the ascetic tradition to the secular world includes the ecological mission: the ancient tradition can help this world to overcome the dangerous deadlock in its relations with the environment.

As a concluding remark, I would say that my analysis can easily be extended to a larger context of all the set of great spiritual traditions. In this context it shows that such traditions can and must play the part of models of ecological consciousness. These models are different from each other and thus we can have a rich pool of sound ecological models, which would represent a unique resource of modern civilization.