

CHURCH THEOLOGY BIO-ENVIRONMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Biopolitics constitutes a new scientific approach to the problems of bios (life). We call it a "new" approach because it is reasonable that man of today is interested in the new problems and phenomena of bios and the world.

We also say that biopolitics constitutes not only a new, but also a scientific approach to the problems of bios, of man and his environment. This is because science is called to give an opinion, a testimony, and judgement for both the old and new bios, and a new, theoretical and practical, more objective, more humane approach.

Which scientific specialty has the privilege of exclusive occupation with the problems of life, of bios? None by itself, but all of them together. All the sciences, theoretical and practical, have something to say about man, about bios.

Last month in Patmos, the 900 years of the historic testimony and the bios of the island were celebrated. It was on this island that the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist was written. This book of the New Testament tells us so much about man and his bios, his environment; about the past, the present and the future of man and all creation.

Both the Church and State did not let this event go unnoticed. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Great Mother Church of the 200 million believers belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Christendom, did not want the event to pass unobserved.

Since 1965 it has been suggested that the island of Patmos should become sacred. In 1974 the State began, for the first time, to think seriously about the matter, so that in 1978 all the legislative procedure was approved.

What does "sacred island" mean, particularly in respect to the spiritual institutions and values of the island, as well as to its natural bio-environment? We cannot separate one from the other. We cannot perceive the revelation (Apocalypse) of God in a violated and "unnatural" physical bio-environment. The sanctification of the spiritual and natural conditions presupposes the message of love of God as the substance of God, as the affectionate relationship between man, and as the harmony of the creatures of the universe.

The proclamation to make a "sacred island" by the leader of the Orthodox Eastern Christendom, on September 24, 1988, was nothing less than the exaltation of the universal message of love, borne out of the magnificent, naturally beautiful cave of the Apocalypse.

The State, in its turn, helped the organization with two scientific congresses on the island. One of them referred to its history, the other to its natural bio-environment. The first was given the title: "900 Years of Historic Testimony" and the second, "Environmental Symposium of Patmos. The Apocalypse and the Future of Humanity". "Man" and "world", "anthropology" and "cosmology", terms and realities which are inclusive, this is the message of Patmos. This message will be analyzed from the viewpoint of the Church, theology and Christian history and praise.

CHURCH AND BIO-ENVIRONMENT

Christianity carries the historical responsibility for the present bio-ecological crisis. The New Testament, and particularly the book of the Apocalypse, presuppose a) the interference of God in the world and in history and b) the role and conduct of man in history and in nature. The end of history will be the end of nature. The continuation of history and nature is a result of divine will and energy.

God became a "god-man", according to the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church, intending to save not only the spiritual man or the material and carnal man, but the whole man, the whole bios, the whole creation. This means that the Creator is interested in the salvation and the cure of all creation: "The unreceived and the uncured".

The responsibility of the Church for biopolitics, for the environment, is the result of its own theology, anthropology and cosmology. That is, its teaching about God, man, bios and the world.

THE FUNCTIONAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The functional life of the Church confirms, on an everyday basis, the above briefly outlined theological contemplation about God, man, bios and nature. How is this achieved? Primarily, through an eucharistic approach of God, of man and of the world: secondly, through an everyday approach of the Church to human and natural conditions. We will continue by analyzing these two approaches:

A. The Eucharistic Approach

The term "eucharistic approach" of the biopolitical and the ecological problem, sounds somewhat strange. Nevertheless, in analyzing this term, we find the thesis and suggestion of the Church theology in the solution to our problem.

What follows is not our concept, but the analysis of the more specialized dogmatic Theologian of Eastern Orthodoxy, the Metropolitan of Pergamos, Ioannes Zezioulas, Professor at the University of Thessaloniki. During the environmental congress of Patmos he said the following: "In the sacrament of the Holy Communion we see the eschatological, the historical and the real approach to God and man, God and the world and the relationships between them."

What is going on during the Holy Communion? The products of nature, wine and bread are exposed. The priest holds them in his hands and offers them with a movement up to God, as creator of the world. He then says, "We offer to you all that is yours from all that is yours".

What does this action mean? That nature's products are not our property. We are only the users of them. We are merely their administrators. This is the first action, the first scene.

The second action is the survival of man through these products of nature. We are called to eat the bread and drink the wine. We use them. We enjoy them. We taste them as material, we feel them, and believe them to be the flesh and blood of our Creator.

The third action in the Holy Communion is the move of the Communion itself. We participate in the sacrament not as individuals within a narrow, egotistical and lucrative aspect, but as members in part, as members of the whole, as a community of persons and fellowmen. This is completed eschatologically, is outside the sense of time and place, but really in the present.

So, the eucharistic approach to the biopolitical problem leads us to the conclusion that man is not the lord and master of creation with a right to rule it as he so wishes, least of all a right to destroy it.

What, then, is the role of man in creation, in relation to bios? He is the priest and the servant and the logical user of creation. This ecclesiastical, theological thesis of bios offers the solution to the biopolitical, environmental and ecological problem.

B. The Everyday Approach

The practical life of the Church is consequent to the above-mentioned theological and functional ideology and teaching. The Church, as a communion of persons, participates in all the manifestations of man, bios and creation. The Church blesses them with the proportionate and wise use and pleasure of man. Nowhere throughout the writings of the Fathers of the Church and the Euchologion of the Church does the idea of ownership, violation and alteration of creation glimmer.

St. John the Golden-Tongued prays "for a universal world". Vassilios the Great wishes that "the winds be mild and beneficial for us, the rains peaceful to the earth for fruition". Mark the Apostle prays "for the proportional ascending of the river waters, for the good showers which will bring seeds to the earth", and he also asks to "send the good showers to the places that need them, bring the river waters to a measure as you choose, increase the fruits of the earth in the seeds and in harvest".

In the Great Euchologion of the Church, we find a multitude of characteristic blessings for the proportionate use of the goods of creation. Below I mention only some titles of special blessings which refer to man, to bios and to creation centered in man, who is the perfection of creation, of bios: the blessing for illness; the blessing for a new house, for the opening of a well; the blessing for fields, gardens; the blessing for seeds, for the threshing floor; the blessing for the planting of a vineyard, for the receiving of grapes on August 6; the blessing for the herds, for the illness of cows, for the animals, for the construction of a vessel, for nets, for silk; the blessing for carnal food, for cheese and eggs; the blessing for a contaminated utensil, wine or flour, for those who have eaten contaminated food.

CONCLUSION

From all the above, we can extract the following conclusions, which show the thesis of the Church's theology and practical life in history, in the present and in the eschatological future as they relate to the bios of man:

- a) The Church approaches all of creation with awe, great respect and much love, because creation is God's work.
- b) Man, as a creation and a child of God is not the lord and master of creation. He is the priest. He is the user. He should, in no way, be the violator, the embezzler, the superconsumer of the goods of nature and of life.
- c) The human reality of today's world has created a distressing situation. Because of the perfection of creation, "all of creation sighs and suffers until now" - because of man, as Paul the Apostle states (Rom.8,22).

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse - War, Famine, Death and the Plague - with the arrow, the sword, the scales and the sickle - attack bio-creation according to the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist.

Who is going to win? The final triumph belongs to the Church, to God in the Holy Trinity, to the God-man, to man and to all new creation. The acceptance of the fact, eschatologically and revealingly, does not suffice. Our participation is required.

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