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## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

By

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### **Introduction**

Christian Theology, through its paternal texts and teachings, can penetrate and find those aspects which reveal original, basic, and essential elements regarding the relationship between Man and the Natural Environment, with the goal of understanding the role of God in the relations of man, the natural world and beyond his mission. In this article we will examine the primary element of the Christian Revelation, which is Theocentrism, that is, the teaching that the existence and meaning of the world and man are found in God (Wilder, 1991). The world's meaning is not found in it, but in its relationship with God and man. Every man's purpose and destiny are directly related to God and his natural environment. The second primary element that we will study in this study is the element of Christian revelation the reference to the original (pre-fallen) ["προπρωτική"] nature of man. It is known, of course, that the human sciences, especially history, refer exclusively to the transitional man. But everything shows how the man is also "something else", how his beginning cannot be just a few stone tools and a few teeth of a prehistoric jaw! But this "something else" is beyond the possibilities of scientific research. This is precisely where Science stops, where the role of divine Revelation and of Christian anthropology begins (Floros, 2000). The Christian Revelation's light illuminates the world and man in a unique way. Without Christian Theology's illumination, the world loses its causal basis and its connection to Christian anthropology, it loses its ontological value and significance. Likewise does the man too. The Christian view of the world and man is based on the reciprocity and interdependence of these two factors and refuses to accept the absolute metaphysical distinction between man and his environment (Xatzinikolaou, 2001). Cosmology and anthropology are separated and mutually interpreted within the wider context of Theology. The subject to be studied and investigated above has numerous implications and a vast array of scientific peculiarities, which is why it becomes extremely intriguing. To this end, we will study and analyze it, focusing our interest on the relationship of man with the Creator God, who made man, the crown of His creations and the king of all Creation. The recommendation is to study how man interacts with the natural world, both according to the Holy Bible and the Sacred Tradition. At this point, within the above frameworks, we will go into the elements of Orthodox Theology, Cosmology and Anthropology to underline and emphasize the basic positions on man's relations with his natural environment.

#### **1. The absolute transcendence of the uncreated God over the created world**

For a long time, philosophical and theological thought has been puzzled by the nature of God and the world (Hatzinikolaou, 1996). Thus, all pre-Christian humanity has accepted that the world is eternal, along with God. The absolute transcendence of God over the world is a fundamental teaching of Christian Theology (Efthymiou, 2002). God transcends the material universe and is nothing like the world. God is both uncreated and eternal, while the world is both created and fi-

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nite. The fact that God created the heavens and earth in the beginning supports the absolute transcendence of the uncreated God over the created world. 1, 1).

Two opposing views were formulated about the relationship between God and the world, with distinction and unity between the uncreated and the created existence. God and the world are not only two realities, but also completely opposite [Eastern hierarchy, Platonism, and Neoplatonism]. The latter, which is both ancient and newer, views God and the world as being both identified and confused [animism of the primitives and pantheism of the younger ones] (Papadimitriou, 1984). However, Christian Theology, while emphasizing the transcendence of God and his abysmal difference from the created world, accepts that between God and His creations, there is no dimension and separation, much more, there is no opposition and conflict, but a wonderful relationship and unity, so that one can speak of a single, uncreated, and created reality (Psariotis, 2000). Indeed, between God and the material world there is a mutual tendency that leads the two parties to create a divine and eternal communion with each other.

Parmenides, Plato, and Origen view immobility as the sole reality of God and the world and view the movement of beings as a fall from it. Aristotle, too, accepted that "the first is moved without motion" (Aristotle, A', *After the Physical*). Heraclitus saw everything as existing in motion [everything says] (Falkos-Arvanitakis, 1999). However, the Eastern Orthodox Fathers and Saint Maximus, the Confessor, developed the vision of the positive "movement" that characterizes God and his built-up creations (Staniloae, 1997). Originally there was a movement of God's love and love for His creatures. God is the supreme and '*only mind of the intelligent and the intelligent*' (St. Maximus, Confessor, *Mystagogia* 664 A). Before their creation, he voluntarily and freely thinks about the created beings. These "thoughts" of God are the "logoi", that is, the models, or the models of created beings. God, as divine "Word of those who say and are said and life of the living and the living" (*Mystagogia* 664 A) leads to the existence of the reasons of created beings. Then God by his divine and uncreated energies of Wisdom, Providence, and Love, descends into the state of the creators, sustains them in existence and binds them one to another and all to Himself. Many Fathers of the Church, especially Saint Maximus the Confessor, when they refer to the coherent, energy of God, which is found in all nature, speak of the "reasons of beings". The creative and cohesive energy of God is what these "reasons of being" are, not archetypes of ideas, as we read in ancient philosophers. God with his loving energy brings all creation together around him because he is the cause and goal of all creation (Psalm 8). There is a divine goal in creating existence. According to Christian theology, this purpose is to elevate the created world to God and to achieve a final union with His Creator. For the success of this purpose, God has engraved in the nature of the creatures (in their reasons) the tendency and the desire to move to unite with Him. Therefore, all creation moves because none of them is the end of it. The Creator has set a goal for each creature from the start, and they have been marching towards it. The Creator's movement is triggered by the desire for purpose and the love of God. The creative "logoi" are embedded in the Divine Verb/Logos (Galanis, 1984). There is a tendency and harmony between the created words and the Divine Word. The supreme Word (Hebr. *Davar*) is the starting point for the reasons behind things and they tend to come back to Him. For this reason, God and the world are a unique reality that has been uncreated and created (see *κτιστο-ἀκτιστη*). Creation is a one-of-

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a-kind organism with a single abundance of a wide variety of creatures. The divine Word is the origin, cause, and purpose of all creatures, which are considered "small parts" of God, not in a pantheistic sense because all levels of created existence participate in the divine Word with their pre-historical reasons and because, consequently, God with His uncreated energy is present in all the creatures of His Creation (Karavidopoulos, 2004).

c) **The world as a space for history [time]:** The Bible recognizes that the world, like time, is not eternal. The creation of the world and time was made by God. Creation initiated the beginning of time. The beginning of history was when creation took place. In *'Hexameros'* (Papoutsopoulos, 1998), Basil the Great emphasizes that time is not eternal but 'symbiotic' with the world. But beyond that, the Bible testifies that God not only created the world and time, but that the world is the space in which God acts and realizes continually, in time, that is, in historical time, various "new" things. Sacred History (sacred time) is formed by the successive events of God's action within the world's space. The most important —"burning under the sun" (Eccl., 1, 9)— event of Sacred History is the Incarnation of the Son of God [John of Damascus]. As a reflection of God, man constantly creates new things and writes his own history. Therefore, human life and history is not an engraved record that repeats the same things, but a straight movement that began with the creation and progresses towards its completion, completion, and renovation in Christ, through a continuous action and creation of God and of man (Matsukas, 2006).

## **2. The absolute dependence of the material world on the free will of man Christian anthropology comes to illuminate the purpose of man's creation, as well as his role in relation to the natural environment.**

a) **Man between God and the world:** With what the Holy Bible mentions about the creation of man [Gen. 1-3], the latter is positioned by God between Himself and the world. In particular, the hagiographic teaching about the creation of man as a material and spiritual existence, inextricably links man with the natural world and the general purpose of the built creation set by God from the beginning (Florovsky, 2003). As a result, man and the world can be identified and distinguished. They are identified in terms of their common created existence and their eternal destiny and are distinguished, in terms of the uniqueness of the construction of man ["in the image" of God] (Bratsiotis, 1967) and the decisive role assigned to him by God to lead himself in deification ["in likeness"] and material buildings in union with their Creator. That is why the Orthodox Fathers call a man a "boundary" creation, because he participates in the sensible and intelligible world and is destined to lead the material creation to its eternal source. Given that God placed man between Himself and the world, the man's role in relation to his natural environment is clearly defined. The first basic element of the relationship between man and nature is the sovereign dominance of the former over the latter, as stated in the relevant biblical passage: "*you have conquered this [earth] and are rulers [of creations]*" (Gen. 1, 28). The fundamental passage of Genesis states that God created man as the King and Ruler of Creation, with the condition of serving nature.

However, this anthropocentric position of the Bible, regarding the relationship of man to the natural environment, should not be interpreted as an absolute and uncontrolled authority of the former over the latter (Walker & Karras, 2001). According to the Fathers, man's sovereign power over nature, which makes him truly a "minor

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god", is not unlimited. The main function of this element is to express the creation of man in the image of God. Orthodox Eastern Fathers emphasize that being "in the image of God" is defined by the gift of domination, which is derived from the power of logic (governing, «*αρχικόν*»). As can be clearly seen, the creature made with the earth is commanded to subdue the earth based on the image of God, that is, of free society and the relationship between man and God. The command "take possession" was given to a man who was created "in the image of God" with the expectation of course that man would retain this gift and therefore continue to act responsibly and carry out the mission entrusted to him by the Creator and use with prudence and responsibility (Gekas, Kandilapti & Tsakiris, 2005).

Another element that reveals the true meaning of 'conquered' is the biblical statement about the purpose for which God placed man in the natural world: to keep with the meaning of care (Gen. 2, 15). The commandment, St John Chrysostom comments, is intended to indicate clearly to man that "he is under the authority of a sovereign governor". The purpose of man being placed in the natural environment is to preserve and safeguard the work of God, as His partner and representative agent. God has placed restrictions and bans on man in relation to the use of the natural environment (Gen. 2, 17), it was for man to realize that "they are under the Lord, and those who belong to him are convinced and those who are protected under him are". In other words, "it is clarified that man's sovereignty consists in the right of exploitation ["to work"], which is however limited under the duty of preserving and securing the earth from the risk of destruction ["and guarding"]. Man's relation to the environment therefore includes the right to authority and the duty to preserve". The role of man in relation to the natural world is to be a partner and representative (housekeeper or/and steward) of God. God assigned man to represent Him in His governmental and providential work for the natural environment in the world. The role of man in the natural environment is to be a mediator (priest). The materialistic nature of man's existence makes him an image of the material world. The natural world is centered around the man, who is both material and spiritual. From this perspective, it acts as a central link that unites all the different parts of material reality (Minitotis, 2022). In this situation, man is more than just a "part" of the world ("microcosm"); the various components of creation are the components of man. As a *microcosm*, man is seen as an intermediary and a mediator between God and the world. As a priest, man elevates himself to God, along with himself and the entire Creation. He thirsts to gather and perfect all the parts of the world within himself: he desires, i.e., the very function of the Divine Word, so to be "logolized" (see *logo-maked*). And there is the ability to unite everything to himself and bring them to God (see *prothesis*), the infinite source of perfection. His value as a priest (Soldatos, 2014) is this. The purpose of God bringing creation into His being was to have all things participate in Him through man.

b) **The world between God and man:** The first phase of the divine Plan, that is, the conception and creation of the built world was done with the free and voluntary will of the uncreated Creator. The second phase of the divine Plan, namely the completion and realization of the divine communion between the Creator and His buildings must also be the fruit of the free and voluntary consent of the buildings. The Creator's will has already been given since the beginning of the divine Plan. The creation's free and voluntary consent and cooperation (see *synergism*) are expected. Humans were called upon to serve in this work, as a 'boundary' and logical manifestation of the unified created reality. The Creator began a dialogue with him immediately after the creation

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of man towards this goal. A dialogue is held between two individuals who are free, the person of the divine Word and man. They are two individuals who engage in a continuous dialogue, thinking and speaking. As the medium of dialogue between himself and man, the divine Word defines the material world. This divine dialogue is served by all that is created and natural. The world is a place between God and man and serves the supreme purpose of creation, which is the realization of the divine communion of both the uncreated and created beings. Given that man is a rational and free creation of God, his response to his dialogue with the divine Word may be positive or negative. It is possible for a man to accept divine love and respond freely and voluntarily with his own love (Botas, 2015). But it can also reject the divine love and interrupt the dialogue and any other contact and relationship with the divine Word.

At the very beginning of this divine-human dialogue, an event occurred in historical time. The beginning of the dialogue between God and man was unfortunately interrupted. The reason for man's existence, which was in God before creation, was not followed. His free will, instead of responding to God's uncreated love, with his own love, directed his love towards creation [cf. "*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasing to the eyes and that it was beautiful to the eye, she took some of its fruit and ate, and gave it to her husband and they ate*" (Gen 3, 6)] and especially in his material body. This choice of man, because it was not in accordance with the movement given by God to his ideal pattern [his word], and was therefore a movement "against nature", had consequently both man and the entire building to warp and skew. The man's incorrect movement resulted in alterations and ontological changes in both him and his natural environment (Kirman, 2008). The decay and destruction of man's 'image' and body in the natural environment of the earth were the most significant changes.

c) **The common course of the world and man:** In the history of the free and rational man, the creation of the illogical creation also takes part. Man, and the world travel together on the road of history in a long journey. This common association is grandiose, but also tragic, but it ends in glory and triumph, that is, the realization of the common purpose of creative existence. The participation of the natural world in human history begins from the first moment of man's creation. Thus, we see that nature participates in the heavenly state of man. Man as the King of creation lives happily and without any problems in a perfect natural environment [springs, trees, soil and so on], in the natural world which is "very good" (*Eden*). The human-environmental relationship is harmonious. The intake of food is carried out within defined frameworks (Gen. 1, 29-30). The scientific knowledge of the natural world is regulated by man's responsible and conscious judgment ['in the image']. The man is also aware of the consequences of any uncontrolled use of the things of the natural environment: "*Or if you eat from it for a day, you will die*" (Gen. 2, 16-17). Moreover, the man's relationship with animals is a relationship of dominance, but also of love and care, according to the model of God-Creator, Whom man was called to represent in His provision for the world. The divine Plan of Creation is fulfilled when man and the natural environment work together.

As previously mentioned, man breaks his relationship with God at the beginning of Creation and moves away from his Creator. This tragic Fall (*Original Sin*), as a disruption of the harmonious relationship between man and God, destroyed the general balance of Creation, and altered and disrupted the relationship of the natural world

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with man (Avgoustidis et al., 2002). The Fall's effects on God's creation were ontological and could have the potential for immediate cosmic destruction.

However, the Creator did not want to accept such an ignominious end to the work of His hands, even at the beginning of His creation. This is why, through direct intervention, he subjected the natural world to the process of disintegration and death, and the human body. Thus, creating participating in the misery of his fallen king, "*was subjected to futility*" (Rom. 8, 20), have entered a state of deterioration and gradual destruction. With the sin of the Fall, just as the death of his body entered a man, so also physical evil entered the material world, which causes the gradual dissolution, decomposition, and final destruction of the natural environment (Youltsis, 2014). A characteristic, but sad picture of this natural decay and destruction is given by the Prophet Jeremiah: "*I looked on the earth and behold nothing, and nothing in the sky, nor its lights. He observed the mountains and the shaking... There were always seven roosters in the sky. And the garden was deserted. This whole world is a desert. The wickedness of the inhabitants of this land has caused the grass in the field to dry up. Beasts and fowls have disappeared. The whole earth has perished*" (Jerem. 12, 4-11. 4, 23-27).

In that transient state of decomposition, the natural world is presented as hostile to man. The inhabitants of the earth are experiencing an increasing amount of problems due to the disorganized workings of nature. The land changed from a blessing to a curse. The soil produces thorns and weeds. These things necessary for survival are even secured by humans with hard work and toil (Gen. 3, 17-19). The friendship and cooperation between animals and humans were dissolved; the relationship between them is characterized by fear and terror: "*when the horrible ferocity of the beasts fell upon them, and they perished by the bites of the crooked serpents...*" (Wisdom 16, 5). The serpent in particular who was "*the wisest of all the beasts of the earth*" (Gen. 3, 1) and the best friend and companion of the early men, now became the most insidious and dangerous enemy of man. Under these conditions, "*the creation has been groaning and co-travailing until now*" (Rom. 8, 22) together with her "*lapsus*" (*«πεπτωκότα»*) partner.

The natural world, along with being involved in the heavenly blissfulness and transitory unhappiness of man, also played a role in Christ's restoration and salvation. In the incarnation of the Son of God, creation anticipates his re-establishment to his primary normal function and joy (Matt. 2, 2, Luk. 2, 13-14). Jesus acts sovereignty over the elements of nature - air, water, trees, soil - and frees them from the state of slavery and decay, restoring them to the instruments of his Kingdom. The Lord's miraculous interventions in the natural environment express the way creation participates in Christ's redemptive work (Zerefos, 2006). However, the creation is also going to participate in the definitive expression of the liberating work of the Savior Christ, that is, in the definitive restoration of the Kingdom of God, as we will see below in this work.

d) The destruction of the natural environment and the entire earth: Death, from the human body, also entered the material world, as instability, disharmony, deterioration, and destruction of the buildings of the earth - and itself - as a whole. The biblical and Christian teachings explicitly state that both man and the earth will die. The sacred texts of the Old and New Testaments contain references to various incidents of destruction of the natural environment. These incidents concern disasters, either with a limited and local extent, such as the Ten Plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7, 8-12), or have a

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more expansive form, like the Flood (Gen. 6 as well as those that are mentioned in Revelation). The images that John the Evangelist uses, in this apocalyptic book, to describe the destruction of the natural environment are so strong and convincing that one can claim that they prefigure the contemporary pessimistic predictions of expert futurologists, ecologists, etc. The burning star *Absinthe* (Rev. 8, 10-11) would be interpreted as an image of toxic contamination of waters and people, which happened in nuclear accident in the Ukrainian city of Chernobyl [which means *Absinthe* or *Api-ganos*, which is an aromatic plant with toxic properties] on April 26, 1986 (Geranios 2011, Despotis 2005). The New Testament has passages that address the general destruction of the Earth, such as the speeches of Christ (Matt. 29), and of the Apostle Peter (II 3, 10-12) about the end of the world. These descriptions are not meant to mean the complete destruction of the world, but rather the alteration and renovation of its entire form. However, the dissolution of the Earth and the destruction of human civilization are explicitly stated by the holy texts: "*The earth and the works on it will be burned up*" (II Pet. 3,10). The upcoming destruction is a divine punishment for mankind's sin and apostasy. This interpretation is based, with a careful look, on the formulation that "*God acts in history beneficially or destructively through the forces of nature and through history, i.e., through natural laws and people*" and the fact that its pages, the Bible is full of incidents, which were done by people, many times unbelieving and non-believing, who acted as instruments of God's punishing will. The Bible's depictions of God's wrath and anger are portrayed in an anthropomorphic way in this version. According to the Christian faith, God is not the cause of evil, but this does not necessarily mean that God does not punish sometimes, as we see in the Bible (Ex. 9, 7 ff., Hos. 13, 7, Is. 5, 5, Luk. 13, 34, Act. 5, 7-11). Perhaps the most correct thing is to accept that the disintegration of the Earth and the destruction of human civilization will be a consequence of the culmination of moral and physical evil in humanity, in the sense of the disruption of the harmony and balance that was determined "from the beginning" by Creator, to exist between man and the natural environment. The meaning and content of this version is gained by examining the relevant predictions of Revelation. Today we understand better and consider very reasonable, the opinion that "*the danger of the destruction of the earth due to the wrong course of civilization is perhaps not different from the destruction of the earth by the angels of Revelation*".

### **3. Restoring man and the world to the eternal Kingdom of God.**

Divine love has never stopped acting on behalf of the perishable man and the perishable world. After man refused and failed to contribute to the divine communion of the created and the Uncreated, God transformed his original plan. This transformation had two axes: on the one hand the Incarnation of the divine Word and on the other hand the resurrection of a man with a simultaneous change of the natural environment.

a) *The Incarnation of the divine Word*: The natural movement of created existence, both of man and of material creation, was restored by the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God. The Incarnation opened new ways for men and the natural world to unite with God and achieve definitive deification. The Incarnation ties God to man and thus the material creation. Because in the person of the God-man Jesus Christ, the two natures, the divine and the human, were united "*unavoidably, unconfused and indivisible*" (Formulations of the 4th Ecumenical Council). The second Adam of Grace, Jesus Christ, accomplished what the first Adam failed to accomplish. The Divine Word, by His Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension, abolished the death of human

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nature and raised man and material creation into the eternal communion and life of the Virgin and Life-giving Trinity. The divine Word assumed the entire created existence by assuming man's material and spiritual existence. With the incarnation of the Son and the Word of God, all human nature, body, soul, and logical thought, as well as human spirit, are received. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*", as Evangelist John tells us about this issue, "*and we shall behold his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1, 14).

b) *The Resurrection of man and the change of the world*: The definitive realization of the deification of man and the eternal union of the created world with His uncreated Creator will be done with a new creative energy of God, during His glorious presence at the end of historical time and the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In this restoration of the Kingdom of God, men will be resurrected and will obtain "the freedom of the glory of the children of God, and the material creation will be freed from the slavery of corruption and will participate in the eternal fellowship of God and the world" (Rom. 8, 21). In this meta-historic reality (Kingdom of God) nature will take part changed and transformed. The natural world will be completely different. New heaven and a new earth: "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...and I saw the holy city Jerusalem again...and he who sat on the throne said, behold, I have made all things new*" (Rev. 21, 1-2, 5). In this eschatological situation, man's relations with the natural environment will be restored and they will become friendly and harmonious again: "*A wolf dwells with a lamb and a sparrow rest with an ox and a calf and a bull and a lion if they graze and a young child care for them. And boos and bows if they graze and if their children are raised and lions and boos if they eat straw and a young child on the crest of the shields and on the bed of the shields, he imposes his hand. And let them not be harmed, nor be able to lose anything on my holy mountain, that the compassion of the Lord is overflowing*" (Isa. 11, 6-9). In conclusion, from cosmogony to the Kingdom of God, the natural environment contributes to the adventure of human freedom, playing an important role in the Creator's antemundane Plan.

c) *The elevation of man and the world to God through the Church*: However, the realization of both the deification of man, and the metamorphosis of the material world begins from the present historical time within the Church, which is gradually working the alteration of the created reality. The basic position of Christian Theology confirms the decisive contribution of Spirituality and Ecclesiology to the issues of Anthropology and, respectively, Cosmology. The Church, in keeping with the work of Christ the God, continues to work on both the sanctification and transformation of man in Christ, as well as the transformation of the physical world. The basic functions with which the Church operates this modification are the Sacred Mysteries. The main aim of the Holy Mysteries is the sanctification of man and the transformation of material elements into realities of the Kingdom of God. In all the manifestations of the Church and especially in the Holy Mysteries, the presence of material elements is necessary, such as bread, water, wine, fruits of the earth, flowers, colors, perfumes and so on.

#### **4. The basic Christian ecological positions are derived from the teachings of the orthodox Fathers.**



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**a) *The value of the world and man:*** The doctrine of the Orthodox Fathers about the prehistoric reasons of the creatures that the Creator freely thought in time, that is the creation of the creatures (hypostatization of their reasons) and the “movement” of the creatures towards their theocentric completion, testifies to the great value that Orthodox Christian Theology gives to the created cosmos, man, and the material world. Even after the Fall, the value of being created remains. Despite the partial disintegration and tarnish of the image, creatures, especially humans, have not ceased their affiliation and orientation to their Creator. Some ancient bishops and Origen believed that God created the material world to punish people, and this was the justification for the progress and development of civilization. However, the optimistic teaching of the Orthodox Fathers about the positive "movement" of man and creatures towards their ultimate end, God, neutralizes all the old and modern pessimistic views about man and material creation (Stylios, 2006). Development, progress, art, and culture in general are not a fall of man and His creations, but the essential and positive consequence of the initial movement that God gave to His creatures and especially to man (Tsitsigkos, 1999).

**c) *The sanctity of the material element:*** The biblical statement about the creation of the world, from start, by God certainly disenchanting and demystified the natural environment and the material world was stripped of the unknown and undefined "spiritual forces", this animistic conception which scared and terrorized, so to speak, people. Therefore, man now lives freely in a pure environment and not in a world full of dubious and capricious gods, who, as the primitives thought, existed in the objects of the natural world (water, trees, animals, totems with taboos) and were identified with them. The natural world's disenchantment does not imply the de-sacredness of matter and the material element in general. Intrinsic holiness is one thing, in which ancient Greek believed, and sanctity by participation is another. As predicted, Orthodox doctrine has always seen the created being in close connection and unity with its Creator (Dayal, 2011). Whilst nature is not divine, it is nonetheless sacred. The sanctity of the natural world comes from the fact that He was made by His Word with His divine energy (Holy Spirit). The Holy Bible, moreover, is full of expressions referring to the beauty, purpose, and harmony, thus the sanctity of the natural creation, which thus illustrates the wisdom and inexpressible greatness of its Creator (Ps. 103, Matt. 25-31 etc.). In particular, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation reveals the positive attitude of God regarding the material element. The redemption that God offers to people is not a release from the material element, as the pre-Christ thinkers interpreted it, but a reception and the deification of the material and created existence. Christ's body, His resurrection and His ascension are the ultimate justification of matter as the "environment" of God.

**d) *The abuse of man's responsibility intendance over the natural environment:*** God's commandment "take possession of the earth" is not, as we mentioned, a passport for man to engage in wanton and unrestrained abuse and destruction of the natural environment. Human sovereignty over nature implies responsibility. It is a responsible sovereign state. This is a fundamental aspect of the biblical teaching on the relationship between man and nature. Christian Theology points out, especially nowadays, the responsible attitude of man towards the natural environment, as the King of Creation and as the preserver of nature, i.e., the created existence that will be united with God and their Creator.

**e) *Man's dubious attitude towards the natural environment:*** Man's abuse of freedom has also made his attitude towards the natural world precarious. Intermediate man can choose activities that either maintain ecological systems and make all forms of life possible or destroy them. The relationship between intermediate man and the natural environment will always be controversial. Natural history confirms and recognizes this old-age biblical truth in modern ecological science. As emphasized above, God did not deprive man of free will in relation to the rest of created existence and the natural environment, but he was given the option to unite with it or to deny it - as happened, several times, historically. Moreover, man's wrong relationship to the natural environment will constantly hinder development and progress, to the point of making impossible the realization of the perfect and ideal society within the framework of the history of this world. The idea that man's evolutionary progress will reach the ultimate perfection in the context of this immanent world is pure utopia (Atmatzidis, 2005). A basic position of Christian Theology is that the Kingdom of God [man's perfect relationship with God and his environment] is a post-historical reality and will not be achieved within historical time.

**5. Christianity, despite taking the impending destruction of the natural world as a given, does not preach pessimism and despair.**

The Christian message is characterized by optimism and hope because of Christ's Divine Incarnation and resurrection. The Christian teaching goes beyond the ecological end and reaches the post-historical, new, and indestructible world of eternity. Christians are citizens of two cities: the present and the future, the "new city", whose craftsman and creator is God (Rev. 21, 2, Heb. 20, 10). Christianity's obligations and duties towards the earthly state are regulated by this perspective of eternity. In particular, the calling and the daily struggle of Christians aim at confronting evil and consolidating and expanding ecological solutions that will be earthly manifestations of the Heavenly state (Stylios, 2003). The Christian, as much as transitional history lasts, is called to be the "Priest" who will constantly change and transform the human and natural environment, until the Lord Jesus Christ comes, who will renovate and transform everything (Tsitsigkos, 1993),

**Epilogue – Conclusions.**

With these conditions, on top of everything that has been mentioned, there is the unfathomable necessity of our return "*to the divine grace in which God created man in the beginning*", saying "*let us make man in our own image and likeness*" (Gen. 1, 26). In order to understand well the highest decoration of the creations, in which the gift of omniscience and the omnipotence of the Creator has nestled. Orthodox Christian theology opens the horizon of understanding the greatness of Creation, so that man admires the creation, but also respects, praises, and glorifies the Creator. The true Christian, thanks Him [God] as the Giver of myriads of "burgeons", which beautify the environment and benefit the "created man" to the maximum. The Theology of the surrounding world with our embrace of the creation makes us able to perceive "*the beauty and the greatness of the Divine, the inexpressible and pro-reason power which had been done before*", which is being detected. The Creator is approached by "touching" His creation. By understanding the purpose of creation, we can trace back to the Creator. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, man must be adorned with virtues (purity, apathy, beatitude, alienation from all evil) for the sake of creation, to please the Crea-

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tor: "with such flowers the Creator of our image planted Nature" (*On the construction of man*, 65A, 21,11). The "likeness" of God is bestowed upon human nature, which is the most honorable of all the phenomenal creations (ibid.) 12.41). Because "creation shall be freed from the slavery of corruption to the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8, 21).

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