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ENVIRONMENTALISM AND MODERN CHRISTIAN ECO-THEOLOGY

У статті розкрито теоретичні аспекти генези екології в контексті сучасних інвайронменталістських соціальних рухів та особливості конфесійних розгалужень екології. Зазначено, що екологічна криза та усвідомлення меж підкорення природи актуалізували проблему духовних засад західної цивілізації. Розглянуті підходи ментального подолання екологічної кризи, які пропонуються мислителями та очільниками різних християнських конфесій. Вказано на докорінну відмінність протестантської екології від її католицько-православних «аналогів». Виявлено, що сама православна екологічна парадигма не є єдиною: в ній чітко вирізняється позиція Вселенського патріархата та РПЦ. У висновках, стверджується, що головні ідеї сучасної екології полягають у переосмисленні доктрин монотеїстичних релігій у напрямку переформатування щодо відношень Бога, світу та людини.

Ключові слова: екологія, інвайронменталізм, екологічні проблеми, протестантизм, католицизм, православ'я, **теологічна екологія**, окультизм, біоетика, есхатологія.

The article reveals the theoretical aspects of the genesis of eco-theology in the context of modern environmentalist social movements and the peculiarities of confessional branches of eco=theology. It is noted that the ecological crisis and awareness of the limits of the subjugation of nature have actualized the problem of the spiritual foundations of Western civilization. The approaches to mental overcoming of the ecological crisis, which are proposed by thinkers and leaders of various Christian denominations, are considered. The fundamental difference between Protestant eco-theology and its Catholic-Orthodox “analogues” is indicated. It is revealed that the Orthodox ecological paradigm itself is not the only one: the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church is clearly distinguished in it. In the conclusions, it is stated that the main ideas of modern eco-theology consist in rethinking the doctrines of monotheistic religions in the direction of reformatting the relationship between God, the world and man.

Keywords: eco-theology, environmentalism, environmental problems, Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, theological ecology, occultism, bioethics, eschatology.

Problem statement. The problem of survival of mankind in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century has acquired the highest significance. The unprecedented growth of scientific knowledge and its technological implementation has not brought humanity either relief from wars or natural disasters. On the contrary, the final conquest of nature and industrial progress have become the causes of the deepening of the ecological crisis, which can lead to the death of all mankind. General warming is only the first symptom of a possible future catastrophe. However, this threat was predicted back in the 70s of the last century. The most insightful thinkers sagacious thinkers even then warned about the coming ecological disaster and called for changes in priorities in thinking and behavior. It was then that a broad environmentalist movement began in the USA and Western European countries, based not only on efforts to preserve nature, but also on calls for fundamental changes, primarily overcoming anthropocentrism and the idea of endless scientific and technological progress. The founding fathers of the environmentalist movement, for example, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, believed that the cause of environmental problems was the biblical spiritual tradition in relation to living and inanimate nature. Even earlier, a similar position was expressed by the American historian Lynn White, who directly blamed Christianity for the modern ecological crisis, which, in his opinion, largely arose as a result of the dominance of the Christian worldview in the West, which views nature only as an object of domination and subjugation by man.

It is these ideological challenges that have led to the emergence of eco-theology, that is, a theological response to these accusations from representatives of various religions and their denominations

(primarily Christian). It is to eco-theology, its sources and specifics, its influence on modern public consciousness, and its interaction with environmentalist movements that our article is devoted.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The analysis of recent research and publications on the basis of which our article is based shows that in recent decades a number of studies have been conducted in Ukraine devoted to the problem of defining the subject and genesis of ecotheology. Thus, the process of the emergence and evolution of eco-theology is considered by such domestic researchers as V. Boreyko, I. Vityuk, T. Gardashuk, A. Gerasymchuk, O. Dobryden, A. Yermolenko, G. Ilyina, I. Fenno, and others. The analysis of changes in the determinants of Western ecotheology has found its place in the works of leading Western researchers of ecotheology and figures of the environmentalist movement such as G. Altner, T. Derr, F. Elder, D. Ferkiss, K. Jorgenson, J. Cobb, A. Næss, A. Padgett, J. Rogers, P. Tyler, J. Zizioulas, L. White and others. At the same time, we turned to the program documents of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, the encyclicals of the Roman Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis I, the epistles and sermons of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I.

The purpose of this article is to identify the essence of ecotheology, its sources and confessional specificity, its influence on modern public consciousness and interaction with environmentalist movements.

Presentation of the main research material. The first attempt at a thorough criticism of Christianity for its anti-ecological nature belongs to the American historian Lynn White, who in 1967 published the article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" [1]. According to L. White, to see the source of environmental problems only in technical and economic growth means to show a superficial, limited approach to the problem, since the causes of environmental difficulties are actually spiritual and originate in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Christianity, especially in its Western version, is the most distant religion from nature. L. White identifies two dangerous moments in Christianity. The first is that Christianity is a monotheistic religion in which God is transcendent in relation to nature. The second is the biblical teaching about man as the crown of nature. In these moments, biblical religion radically differs from European paganism [1]. L. White identified the advantages of the pagan worldview for the formation of an appropriate respectful attitude towards nature, because in the era of antiquity, every tree, every stream, every mountain had its own protective spirit, which was accessible to man and in many ways similar to him. Any attempt to cut down a tree or block a stream encountered invisible resistance from these spirits. Before committing an act of destruction of a natural object, a person had to think about its consequences. Christianity, according to L. White, deprived man of this restraining principle. Therefore, Christianity bears a huge burden of historical guilt. According to the historian, it is guilty of the ecological crisis not only directly, but also indirectly, as a religion that made scientific and technological progress possible. It was science, thanks to technological achievements, that created tools that allowed man to exploit nature on a large scale and ruthlessly. L. White believed that European science has deep roots in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition [1]. According to many modern researchers, L. White's thesis remains to this day the dominant factor in the influence of religious beliefs on environmental attitudes and behavior.

One of the first attempts to oppose L. White was made by the Protestant (Presbyterian) theologian Jack Rogers, who was probably the first to use the term "ecotheology". He sharply criticized L. White's concept and suggested that he turn at least to the works of Augustine Aurelius to recognize the falsity of his views. J. Rogers also provided a certain outline of the direction he initiated: "Ecotheology is a form of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationships of religion and nature, especially in the light of environmental problems" [2, p. 180].

However, together with L. White, the famous Norwegian environmentalist and ecophilosopher A. Nays also criticized the Judeo-Christian position on living nature: "The self-confidence of man, which is revealed in the Bible," the scientist wrote, "lies in the idea of superiority, which is expressed in the fact that we exist as a chosen intermediary between the creator and the creation" [3, p.123]. This belief led to the fact that man, without any grounds, began to consider himself a higher being, and all other living beings, only a means of satisfying his, often far from rational, needs. Considering the right to life as his natural, inalienable right, he denied the existence of such a right in all other animals and plants, exterminating entire species of living beings. The polemic between ecotheology and environmentalism unfolded at the end of the 20th century in Western Europe and the USA. L. White and A. Nays with their numerous followers believed that humanity needed a new religion that would change such attitudes and contribute to the preservation of the environment. However, eco-theologians (mostly Protestant) have provided a solid arsenal of arguments that refute such conclusions. For example, most of them pointed out that there are enough places in the Bible that testify to the intrinsic value of all creation, not just man. Man is faced with a constant choice between good and evil, and the test instrument for the correctness of the choice is a person's attitude not only to his neighbor, but also to other living beings and nature as a whole. According

to some eco-theologists, it is philosophy, not Western religion, that is to blame for the emergence of views that harm the environment, and the way out of the modern ecological crisis is not so much the establishment of legal or economic means of regulation, but rather the raising of religious consciousness and voluntary self-restraint.

That is, eco-theology was born in the Protestant environment (mostly in the USA). Protestant ecological concepts, unlike other currents of Christianity, are characterized by significant diversity and close connection with the main Western interpretations of the ecological crisis. Not limiting themselves to explaining the causes of the ecological crisis only by human sinfulness, Protestant theologians try to prove that the "ecological balance" was disturbed as a result of a change in religious attitudes towards nature.

The prominent Protestant theologian T. Derr calls for a rethinking of some biblical provisions. He believes that it is necessary to return "to the biblical texts, read anew, from the point of view of ecological concepts", and reduces the ecological problem primarily to religious and ethical issues, emphasizing that "the center of the discussion in solving ecological problems is Christian theology and ethics" [4: 3] presents them as "demons" that are harmful to humanity; but they are only a projection of the evil inherent in man, an expression of his "sinfulness", "a product of free will". Many theorists of Protestantism believe that it is enough to change some Christian principles to overcome the contradictions in the "society-nature" system. J. McQuarrie assigns the leading role in establishing harmony between society and nature to "profound changes" in the value system of society, mainly to changes "in the sphere of Christian religion". D. Ferkiss argues that it is "Christianity that will be able to play a major role" in solving environmental problems. In conditions of raw material shortages, it is Christianity with its influence on millions of people "in the future society of restriction and coercion, it will probably be easier for it to play a normative social role than it was possible in modern Western culture with its Promethean and materialistic aspirations" [5: 26]. Christianity will become the main "ideological and institutional force that legitimizes the new social order" [5, p.26].

These ideas are widely supported by representatives of the Protestant "process theology". Criticizing the "anthropocentric" concept, they try to prove the existence of a transcendent connection between nature, humanity and God, and the formation of a "new vision of nature" requires: combining science, theology and ethics; forming a "new ecological view of nature, man and God"; to develop a new "ethics of life" that will educate in man "responsibility for all living things before God" [6, p.70–71].

The theory of the "new asceticism" occupies a special place among the ecological concepts proposed by Protestant thinkers. Theorists of the "new asceticism" F. Elder and J. B. Cobb believe that the main cause of the ecological crisis was man's desire for unlimited economic growth. F. Elder believes that it is the "new asceticism", the elements of which are "restriction", "respect for all living things", that can lead to the replacement of "exploitation of nature with its harmony", and for this "we must be more moderate in the consumption of natural resources, limit population growth and develop a sense of reverence⁴. He believes that for this it is necessary to make changes in religious beliefs and create an "environmentalist theology". Such views are also supported by John B. Cobb. He argues that "theologians must participate in the development of a new way of life", the basis of which will again be moral and religious changes" [6, p. 41–42].

Eco-theology has acquired its most systematic presentation in the works of the German Protestant theologian Günther Altner. Back in 1977, he published the work "Ecological Theology", the main thesis of which is that the crisis of survival has become "the central challenge for theology". He understands the ecological formulation of the question as a theological one, which all theological disciplines should set for themselves. Ecological theology for G. Altner is "necessarily practical, universal and interdisciplinary", since it is a reflection on the conditions of survival of humanity under the condition of a possible premature end of earthly life [7]. The task of Christians is to learn a new art of death. The reality of the transcendent dimension surrounding man is recognized in the conditions of technical civilization only when the claims of this civilization to eternity are destroyed and the onset of crisis and death is realized. From the apocalyptic threat, a new perspective for life arises, which begins to be realized as having a limit. G. Altner develops his theology in an unusual for a theologian detailed and competent dialogue with various branches of natural science. At the same time, he characterizes the modern situation of the dialogue by the fact that systemic-theological, evolutionary-theological, ecological, ethical, legal attempts to comprehend and reason about the theology of creation are aware of the fact that they are generated by the crisis of relations between man and nature, and this can become both the beginning of the death of all things and the continuation of development at the level of a new integration. G. Altner presents a theological justification for an ethics of respect, which aims to consider all living beings as ethical subjects. The ecological challenge appears to him as a challenge to all theological disciplines, which must give new interpretations to creation and human

responsibility towards creation in close dialogue with the ecological sciences, with environmental movements and all those who care daily for the protection of life [7].

Thus, the active dispute about the responsibility of Christianity for the ecological crisis has, although not centuries-old, but still a long history. The main points in this dispute were accusations. in a utilitarian, instrumental approach to nature, conditioned by the idea of human domination over nature; criticism of anthropocentrism, claims about the higher status of man, compared to all other living beings; and, finally, criticism of the idea of the qualitative separation of the Creator and creation, which justifies both anthropocentrism and a utilitarian attitude towards nature. In addition to the already mentioned L. White, who especially intensified the discussion, these issues were discussed by many philosophers, theologians, mainly Protestant, who reflected on the issue of protecting nature.

In 2020, the book "Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation" was published, which is a kind of summary of the development of Protestant eco-theology, a reflection of the current state of the aforementioned discussion. Forming as an interdisciplinary field within the ecological humanities, today Protestant eco-theology unites the natural and social sciences, collaborates with various forms of ecocriticism in the work of rethinking the Holy Scriptures, "revising and teaching new ways of worship, prayer, and preaching; rethinking the boundaries of Christian doctrine; reforming the mission of the church" [8]. Unlike Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox ecotheology are institutionalized in nature and are presented, primarily, in the writings, sermons, epistles, and activities of the highest hierarchs of these Christian churches. The Catholic Church was one of the first to respond to visible signs of an ecological threat. Already in 1971, Pope Paul VI in his apostolic letter "Octogesima adveniens" warned humanity against the unreasonable use of natural resources, which leads to the destruction of nature and, accordingly, to the destruction of the prerequisites for human life. Ecological issues of human responsibility for their natural environment were raised in the encyclicals of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. But until 2015, there was no encyclical fully devoted to the theological understanding of environmental issues in Catholicism. Only on May 24 of this year did the encyclical of Pope Francis I "Laudato si, mi' Signore" – "Glory be to you, Lord" appear [9, p.847–944].

In it, Francis considered the ecological crisis as a consequence of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of humanity and put forward the idea of creating an "integral ecology", that is, a comprehensive approach that combines environmental problems with social and economic. The Pope emphasizes the close connection between the poor and the vulnerability of the planet. The document calls on people to "ecological behavior" – to change their thinking, lifestyle and behavior in order to move towards sustainable development and more responsible consumption. The encyclical emphasizes that the Earth is our common home, which must be cared for, and that ignoring environmental problems is a serious injustice to future generations [9, p.940]. "Laudato si'" has become one of the most famous and influential documents of Pope Francis. It has caused a wide resonance and active discussion not only in the Catholic Church, but also in the world community. The encyclical has contributed to the growth of environmental awareness and served as a source of inspiration for numerous initiatives, programs and projects aimed at protecting the environment. It should be noted that in this work, as in other encyclicals of previous pontiffs, the term "ecology" is never used.

However, it is widely used by Catholic thinkers, analyzing problems of the relationship between Christian dogma and modern environmental consciousness. For example, in September 2021, a conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain was held in the Irish city of Maynooth together with the Irish Theological Association under the symbolic name "Eco-Theology: A New Heavens and a New Earth". It featured reports by Catholic eco-theologists: Ashley Beck, Peter Sherle, Celia Dean Drummond, and Catriona Russell. Of particular note was the report by Peter Tyler and Salvador Ryan, in which they considered eco-theology in the broad context of general spirituality and the development of material culture. In particular, they call for "engaging in eco-theology at the foot of the Cross". Peter Tyler and Salvador Ryan analyzed the views of eco-theologists of various directions and their influence on the formation of a Christian response to the modern environmental crisis [10].

Analyzing the specifics of Orthodox eco-theology, it is impossible not to recall the sermons, works and activities of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (Dimitrios Archondonis), who deservedly received the title of "green patriarch". Following his predecessor Patriarch Demetrios, he established many fruitful connections with politicians, officials, scientists, based on environmental interests and responsibility for peace. The activities of the "Green Patriarch" can be divided into three interrelated parts.

First, these are the so-called "green appeals" of the Patriarch. Every year on the day of prayer for creation (September 1), established by the previous Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios in 1989, Bartholomew addresses all Christians, all religions in general, scientific communities and cultures with a message about

the need and importance of environmentally responsible behavior in what God created. In recent decades, the Ecumenical Patriarch has been working to unite theology and ontology, emphasizing the inseparability of the natural and supernatural realms. This attitude reflects the Orthodox Church's teaching about nature as a substance filled with God's grace, even as it "walls" with the rest of creation. The second is a green symposium on water. In 1994, Patriarch Bartholomew founded the Religious and Scientific Committee, which is dedicated to the preparation and holding of international, interdisciplinary, and interreligious symposia on environmental protection. One of the main areas of the committee's work is the study of the state and fate of rivers and seas, which cover two-thirds of the planet's surface. To achieve maximum effect in solving environmental problems, the patriarch invites representatives of other Christian denominations, representatives of the major world religions, scientists, ecologists, journalists and politicians to symposia. Also, symposia, uniting different faiths and denominations, reveal the wisdom of various theological traditions and the common imperative to protect the natural world. Thus, during a symposium dedicated to the Adriatic Sea in 2002, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew signed a joint declaration emphasizing the spiritual duty to care for God's creation for future generations.

Thirdly, Patriarch Bartholomew is known worldwide as an environmental speaker. He draws the attention of politicians and dignitaries to the fact that there is a relationship between the international economy and global ecology. He makes people think about the meaning of the Greek words *oiko-nomia*, *oiko-logia* and *oikou-mene*, which are cognate with the word *oikos*. The basic meaning of the word *oikos* is also a house. Our world is our home, the home of every person and creation. Everyone should remember that *oikonomia* (economy) means the care and management of our household; *oiko-logia* (ecology) is the study, study, knowledge of our economy. The relationship between economy and ecology is not accidental. No person can live pretending that the world does not exist. The Patriarch emphasizes that we are not isolated human beings, but social beings who must live in community and share peace with everyone. Human attitude to the created natural world directly affects and reflects the attitude of all people. Therefore, the Orthodox Church recognizes that natural creation is inseparable from the essence and destiny of humanity [11, p.157]. Moreover, because our attitude towards other people and towards the environment on this earth is a clear symbol of how we believe in the Living God. It seems that it is not so easy to combine modern environmental problems with theological premises. Although Patriarch Bartholomew realizes that for most scientists and politicians the attempt at such a connection is a paradoxical and even eccentric enterprise, he tries to convince them that ecology should be connected with theological cosmology and anthropology. If humanity wants to survive, it should remain on the foundation of ecology alone. The main question: why does man destroy the environment? Patriarch Bartholomew believes that man destroys nature in order to use it in his own interests, to provide himself with more benefits and comfort in everyday life [11, p.204]. Such behavior is by definition irrational. Changing such an attitude towards the environment requires the help of a theological view of the world as God's creation. The value of Orthodox ecological theology (eco-theology), in our opinion, lies in the fact that it necessarily has the status of ontologicality, of involving a person in being. Orthodox, as well as Christian consciousness in general, indicates to a person "the path to being", "the path to gaining experience of direct experience of being" [10]. The experience of being, which is described by some Christian saints (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa) allows one to go beyond the boundaries of the "small self", to abandon attachment to the goods of this world, from worries about oneself, about one's tomorrow. Involvement in the world of being "opens up the possibility for a person, being in the ordinary world – the world of interactions, to adjust his behavior in accordance with the "existential" scale of values, imposing strict restrictions on the nature and scale of his actions [11, p.208]. In addition, this status of ontologicality will allow one to reveal the substantive elements of the ecological imperative as an internal ecological law. Fulfilling the ecological imperative within the framework of Orthodox theology is not blind observance of a "commandment" motivated by fear, but a natural manifestation of love in response to all creation, a human response to the boundless love of the Creator.

Bartholomew I calls for an optimistic worldview, for the position that it is not too late to start caring about the environment now for the happiness of our descendants: "The natural environment – forests, water, land – belongs not only to the present generation, but also to future generations. We must frankly recognize that humanity has the right to something better than what we see around us. We, and, even more so, our children and future generations have the right to a better and brighter world, a world free from degradation, cruelty and bloodshed, a world of generosity and love. Selfless and selfless love for our children will show us the path we should follow in the future" [12, p.142]. Regardless of our beliefs, views, convictions, we all want to breathe clean air, we all want to live, and therefore it is not too late for us to unite for the sake of the future: "We are all in this together," states Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. "Indeed, the natural

environment unites us when transcendent doctrines distinguish. We may differ in our concepts of the origin of the planet - biblical or scientific. However, we all agree on the need to protect its natural resources, which are neither infinite nor available [12, p.144]. Thus, in the works and statements of Patriarch Bartholomew I, one can find a holistic and consistently presented system of environmental philosophy. Its key thesis is the idea that the environment is the creation of the Lord, the result of God's action, and the world is a sacred place full of beauty. Awareness of the harmony of creation implies an understanding of the balance and measure of consumption and use of resources. Ecological degradation arises from our spiritual imperfection. Changing our attitude towards the environment based on the non-utilitarian principle of reverence for Creation is a condition for the spiritual transformation of man, which is necessary for the good of future generations.

All Orthodox theologians, reflecting on the ecological theme, focus their attention on one or another area, reveal it in more detail, or even defend the ideas themselves only in a different form. Thus, the modern Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamum, claims that the ecological crisis has a spiritual dimension. The area of this dimension is directly related to the church and theology, therefore they cannot remain silent when the world is under threat of destruction. He identifies several dimensions of Orthodox theology related to the ecological issue:

1. The world was created out of nothing. It is in constant danger of returning to nothingness. The world is not eternal, even it is fragile like a crystal vase, and it should be treated with reverence, fear and awe;
2. Such a caring attitude towards the world was entrusted by God to man as a being different from the rest of creation, including the angels. According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, man consists of the material and the spiritual, in order to be a microcosm of creation. Angels, as spiritual creatures, cannot be mediators between the world and God. Man, as a priest of creation, has the unique mission of uniting creation and the Creator, the material world and God. The human task is not simply to save creation, but also to sanctify and bring it to the level of divine existence. The essence of the priesthood of man is to return creation to its Creator;
3. The salvation of humanity through Christ and in Christ is a cosmic event. Through man, all creation will be saved. Christ not only saves man from himself, but also frees all creation. The incarnation of Christ was nothing other than the assumption of human nature, not simply to save man, but also to save the rest of creation through participation;
4. The Eucharist defines Orthodox theology not so much as an intellectual, psychic experience, but as an experience. The Eucharist is not simply a "memory" of Christ's death and resurrection, but a cosmic event that involves all creation. The bread and wine are not simply symbolic elements that bind the Church to the final events of the Last Supper, but they are the world of creation. Therefore, the Orthodox Christian, by partaking of the Eucharist, testifies that the material world must be saved, liberated, and united with God;
5. The ascetic experience of the Orthodox Church is often mistakenly perceived as an example of a negative attitude towards creation. Asceticism is perceived as a belittling, a rejection of the material world. This is a neoplatonic understanding of matter, of the material, which is far from true church asceticism. Asceticism abstains from or withdraws from the material world not because it is considered bad, but because of a deep respect for matter, so as not to use it to satisfy one's own individual needs. Another aspect of asceticism is that the ascetic participates in the suffering of all creation, mourning the death of even a bird or an animal. Such sensitivity towards nature is not negative in nature, but rather reflects a positive attitude towards nature, as a result of love and respect for the material world [13].

The central idea of Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), which unites these dimensions, is that man is by his calling a priest of creation, which places on him and on the church the obligation to preserve the environment. The Metropolitan concludes that neither ethics, nor legislation, nor science can independently solve the problem of ecology. "Modern society needs a new approach, a new mentality, a new ethos, and all this can be found with the help of the church. For centuries, in the Orthodox Church, believers were educated through fasting, a respectful attitude towards the material world, and a liturgical understanding that creation belongs to God. In this sense, people were less egocentric than we are now. Only when a person learns to be a priest of creation can we hope to develop the right approach to solving the ecological problem that humanity faces today," concludes Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) [13].

It should be noted that the modern Russian Orthodox Church, after a period of some interest in environmental issues (after the Chernobyl disaster), in the person of hierarchs and obedient theologians, condemned eco-theology as a heretical doctrine and even closed the Department of Ecology at the Russian

Orthodox University [14]. And now, when the ROC openly sanctifies the aggressive war against Ukraine, it also reproaches the Ecumenical Patriarch for refusing to support its henchmen in Ukraine: “If only Patriarch Bartholomew had at least half the concern for the Orthodox people (meaning the accomplices of the occupiers from the UOC MP – V. P.) that he has for ecology!” [15]

However, the Ecumenical Orthodox Church remains faithful to the concept of “theological ecology” of Patriarch Bartholomew (this is what the theologians of Constantinople propose to call Orthodox ecotheology). This is evidenced by the International Ecotheological Symposium, which took place in early October 2025 at the Patriarchal Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete on the theme “Ecotheology: Dynamics of Shared Responsibility”.

The symposium highlighted two key points. First, the timeless role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in establishing September 1 as the Day of Prayer for the Protection of the Environment at the ecumenical and global levels; and second, the urgent need for an ecological culture to prevail, which will oppose the consumerism and unbridled growth that dominates modern society.

“The role of humanity is not to dominate creation, but to coordinate, protect, initiate and priestly, since nature is not an instrument or resource for human satisfaction, but a companion on the eschatological journey towards the salvation of all creation,” declared Augustinos Bayraktaris, professor of Orthodox theology and ecumenical movement at the Patriarchal Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete, at this forum. “Furthermore, it has been repeatedly noted that ecological injustice, combined with human greed, is the root of the current ecological crisis. Thus, in order to create a just, participatory and sustainable society for all, it is essential to cultivate responsibility as the fruit of the exercise of freedom, both individually and collectively,” Bayraktaris said. “Thus, human freedom endangers contemporary global Christianity, especially in the context of its liturgical ministry. Therefore, preserving the integrity of the environment and human dignity is not a matter for a few or experts, but a matter of life for all, because the Earth is our common and unique home” [16].

It is impossible not to agree with this statement: indeed, preserving the ecological system of our planet is a common cause of Protestants and Catholics, Orthodox and representatives of non-Christian religions, occultists and atheists. And eco-theology, whatever names it takes in various confessional doctrines, is one of the most significant challenges of the beginning of the 21st century.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. A synthetic philosophical and theological trend called “eco-theology” emerged and gained popularity in religious, scientific, and political discourses in the 1970s. It reflects the branch and direction of Protestant (and partly Catholic) theological research related to the apologetics of dominant beliefs in response to the radical criticism of environmentalists of religious doctrines, primarily Christian, in their anthropocentric orientation, which became the cause of a destructive attitude towards nature and the modern ecological crisis. The main ideas of modern ecotheology are to rethink the doctrines of monotheistic religions in the direction of reformatting the relationship between God, the world, and man. Most Protestant eco-theologists put forward:

- the idea of divine immanence in the entire Cosmos;
- a relational, ecological, rather than hierarchical understanding of God, people, and the created world;
- a radical reformatting of the view of human dominion over nature in terms of partnership with nature;
- preaching justice for all creatures, not just humans, emphasizing the needs of the impoverished masses and endangered species worldwide.

These ideas are also presented in a somewhat modified form in the ecological paradigm of modern Catholicism. In recent years, its content has been significantly influenced by the encyclical of the late Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio) “*Laudato si*”. In Orthodox theological discourse, ecotheology is represented by the “theological ecology” of Patriarch Bartholomew and his like-minded people. However, the Orthodox concept is not unified: the head and theologians of the Russian Orthodox Church, in contrast to the Universal Church, have a more rigid position on environmentalist movements, accusing them of occultism and paganism. Perhaps, criticism of this position will become the subject of our further research.

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