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Ecological Theology of Creation in the Perspective of the Theology of the Trinity

Ekologiczna teologia stworzenia w perspektywie teologii Trójcy Świętej

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Abstract: The action of God is always the action of the Trinity. Therefore, proper interpretation of theological issues requires taking this truth into account as it must be presumed to have a specific influence on the shape of the relationship between man and the world. Since God has revealed Himself as a Trinity of Persons, this must inspire man's view of the world from the perspective of faith. This is the reason for attempting to interpret the ecological theology of creation from a Trinitarian aspect. The analysis of biblical and theological sources provides the basis for this. The analyses carried out reconstruct the traditional issue model of the theology of creation. They develop an understanding of the relationship between God and creation. For the triune God is the model and deepest source of relationality. The essential love between the persons of the Trinity and the profound relationship of love between the Triune God and creation carries an inspiring message for the development of man's relationship to the world according to God's design. This should constitute the essential foundation of an ecotheological praxeology.

Keywords: theology of creation, theology of the Trinity, ecology, ecotheology, Christianity and ecology, religion and ecology

Streszczenie: Działanie Boga jest zawsze działaniem Trójcy. Dlatego we właściwym interpretowaniu zagadnień teologicznych uwzględnienie tej prawdy jest konieczne. Należy bowiem przypuszczać, że będzie miała ona specyficzny wpływ na kształt relacji między człowiekiem a światem. Skoro Bóg objawił się jako Trójca Osób, to musi stanowić to inspirację dla patrzenia człowieka na świat w perspektywie wiary. To jest powodem podjęcia próby interpretacji ekologicznej teologii stworzenia w aspekcie trynitologicznym. Analiza biblijnych i teologicznych źródeł daje ku temu podstawy. Przeprowadzone analizy przebudowują tradycyjny model zagadnień teologii stworzenia. Rozwijają rozumienie relacji między Bogiem i stworzeniem. Trójjedność Boga jest bowiem wzorem i najgłębszym źródłem relacyjności. Istotowa miłość między osobami Trójcy oraz głęboka relacja miłości między Bogiem Trójcą a stworzeniem niesie z sobą inspirujący przekaz dla budowania relacji człowieka do świata zgodnie z zamysłem Boga. Stanowić powinno zasadniczy fundament ekoteologicznej prakseologii.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia stworzenia, teologia Trójcy Świętej, ekologia, ekoteologia, chrześcijaństwo i ekologia, religia i ekologia

Introduction

A truly Christian theology cannot stop in its reflections at the truth of the One God. It is necessary to take into account Jesus Christ's message in the New Testament, which reveals God the Trinity (Ganoczy 1992; Bartnik 2003; Ozorowski 2011). For the action of God is the action of the Trinity, beginning with the work of creation. This is why, the created world is theophoric. It is the work of the Father accomplished by the Son in the Holy Spirit (Müller 2016). The work of creation comes from God the Father as the source of all being, but at the same time it must be seen as the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit, since individual creatures are the "word" of the Word, through which the Creator speaks to human cognition. They are also the "gift" of the Gift – for they bear the mark of the Holy Spirit on them (Urbański 2002). Therefore, although the texts of the Old Testament, especially Genesis, are fundamental for creationist reflection (also in ecotheological terms), the truth of the Trinitarian action of God, as conveyed by the New Testament, is the fundamental and unquestionable starting point of ecotheology.

The attempt to develop a holistic vision of this problem seems increasingly important. Although the truth of the Trinity God is a fundamental dogma of the faith, it is treated marginally in Catholic ecotheological studies. "Believing in one God who is trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation" (Francis, 2015). Here, the Pope evidently draws on the intuitions contained in the thought of Saint Bonaventure. This great theologian saw the manifestation of the Trinity in creation in three ways. These were: trace, image and likeness (Bonaventure). These intuitions have already been taken up in publications inspired by the text of *Laudato si* (Heuvel, 2018; Schlesinger, 2018; Sequiera, 2019). However, it is not a complete picture. Hence the addressing of this issue in the present text.

Therefore, the biblical foundations for building a theology of creation with a Trinitarian profile were first presented. They became the inspiration for the creation of theological interpretations of this issue, as confirmed by the historical development of theology. Among these, the theory of perichoresis seems to be the most bearing one. It attempts to explain the mystery of the inner life of the God of the Trinity and is particularly inspiring for ecotheological research. The relationality that is fundamental to this theory provides an important impetus for a proper understanding of the relationship between God, man and the world.

1. The biblical foundation of trinitarian theology of creation

The Scripture first presents the Father as the Personal Beginning, the Source of creation. This is the essential message of the Old Testament texts, emphasising the truth of the singularity of God the Creator (Buxakowski 2006). Therefore, the Book of Genesis presents the world as a gift of the Father, revealing His love, carrying within it the task for human life and work (Danczak 2004). Jesus himself, in His preaching, presents the theme of creation in parables. The motifs of the farmer, the sower, the owner of the vineyard, elements of nature such as plants, animals, the weather (Mt 6:25-34; 7:25-27, 11:7; 13:16, 2-3; 20:1-16) show the love, goodness and wisdom of the Father, who gives creation existence and purpose. He cares for the welfare of creatures, for the best possible conditions for growth and development (Mt 6:8; 6:25-33) (Bartnik 2000; Schottroff 1989).

By the logic of the revelation, the mystery of God in the Trinity is most perfectly realised in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, in whom we find all the reality of creation. Since the Father can grant Himself to creation only through the Son in the Holy Spirit, the message of the Son – the Word born of the essence of the Father – is necessary (Jagodzinski 2015). God the Father

brought creation into existence through His Word, which is the Son endowed with creative power. The Son-Word is the reflection of the invisible God and becomes at the same time the prototype of all created things, which through Him point to the eternal love of the Trinity (Knoch 1992).

This is fully justified by the teaching of the New Testament. Applying the principle of appropriation, it presents Jesus Christ not only as Redeemer, but at the same time as the creator (Christ as Creator and Soter), combining the Judaic idea of Wisdom (Hakemah, Sophia, Sapientia) with that of the Logos (Dabar, Verbum) – the Person of the Son of God. Jesus Christ “through whom all things were made” (1 Cor 8:6) is portrayed as the Wisdom of God in creation and as the creative principle. As Wisdom existed from the beginning, before creation, so Christ has primacy in all things, is the *raison d'être* of creation and “the firstborn in relation to every creature; in Him, through Him and for Him all things were created. He is before all things and all things have existence in Him” (Col 1:15-20). In God there are ideas of individual entities that have been realised in His creative act, brought forth beyond Him and made real with the inalienable stamp of the Divine Logos (Kehl 2007). In this way, the nature of the created world is the “living garment of the Godhead”: that which is corporeal, material, is wholly positive, imbued from the beginning with the divine spirit. The environment (environment-sacrament) thus imbued with the divine became the preparation for the Incarnation of Christ (Tarnowski 1982).

Also, according to St Paul’s conception, Christ is the exemplary-final cause of the universe, and the principle of its coherence. The uncreated Christ (Col 1:16), like the Wisdom of the Book of Proverbs (Chapter 8), is, as it were, the model, the mirror in which God saw the plan of the universe when creating it. In creating, God gazed at His Wisdom, which is the Son of God. Therefore, the world is order, it is “imbued with wisdom” (Job 38:40; Sir

24:1-22; 42:15-25). In this sense, everything has been created in Christ. He is the principle of the coherence of the universe. Thanks to Him, the world is a harmonious whole, a beautiful order in which all the elements support each other. Without Christ, the world would remain in chaos: “a world without the Word of God would make no more sense than a sentence without a verb” (Grzeškowiak 1980).

The world bears Christ’s signature on it as it were, is constantly guided by Him and sings His praises. Saint Paul affirms that all things were created for Christ: He, the Logos Incarnate has royal authority over the cosmos, which, however, is not imposed on the world from outside. From the very moment of creation, the universe in its entirety bears the image of Christ and speaks of Him: Christ – Uncreated Wisdom, participated in the creation of the universe, while Christ – Incarnate Wisdom is the goal of all things (Grzeškowiak 1980).

The hymn from the Letter to the Hebrews glorifies Christ as the Creator through whom the Father “created the universe”: “This Son, who is a reflection of His glory and a reflection of His essence upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:1-3). The Son of God is the “heir of all things” because through Him God created the universe (cf. Heb 1:2). Through the Word of God, who is Christ, the creation of the world was accomplished. He is the continuous Source of Light, Existence and Life. He sustains all things by the word (*hrema*) of His power (Heb 1:3), extends His authority over the spiritual and material world, from its beginning to its end. Also, in the Prologue of John’s Gospel, Jesus is the creative word. To Him all creation gives glory (Rev 5:13) (Bartnik 2000).

The person of the Holy Spirit also plays a special role in the creative work of creation. He appears not only as a force, but as a divine Subject. The Spirit of God (*ruah*) is the creative force and presence of God in His creation (Ozorowski 2011). It is He who, at the moment of creation, “hovered over

the waters” (Gen 1:2). In the power of this Spirit, the Father, through the Son, created the world and maintains it in existence against the continual processes of decay and annihilation. He continually “renews the face of the earth” (Ps 104:29-30). God creates the world by sending his Spirit, who is the Giver of life and the Vivifier. The Spirit is the effective power of the Creator: he animates created entities, being present in creation, sustaining it against annihilating nothingness (Murad 2022).

2. The theological potential of the Trinitarian theology of creation

The Trinity of Persons, whose intrinsic principle of life is love, turns outward (*ad extra*), grants existence and bestows goodness in a triune work. In eternal difference but also triune love, the three divine persons create the world together: “the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit” (Ganoczy 1992). However, interpretive differences can be discerned in the theological tradition. The theology of the Western Church, for which a kind of formal specification will be the Latin language and the unquestionable authority St Augustine, will tend towards approaches that emphasise the unity of God’s action of the Trinity. It regards all God’s works *ad extra* as common: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one creator God. The Greek-speaking theology of the East emphasises more the plurality of persons, attributing the creative act mainly to God the Father. He is referred to as the “Beginning without beginning”, who acts through the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Begotten Son and the Breathed Spirit are the acts of the Father on whose “motive” the world is created. Creation takes place as a result of the personal relations in the Trinity, on the motif (pattern, norm, essence) of the Logos, the Word of God, and on the motif of the communion of Persons, which is personified by the Holy Spirit (Bartnik 2000).

Nevertheless, Western theology too, although it speaks of the ontic unity

of the action of the divine persons, in the historical perspective the special function in the work of creation is attributed to the Father, in the work of salvation to the Son, in the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit (Jan Paweł II 1987). The Fourth Lateran Council expresses this truth with the words: “The Father-begotten, the Son-begotten, the Holy Spirit-begotten: co-eternal and equal to one another, they are the one origin of all things, the creator of everything visible and invisible, spiritual and material. This one God, by His omnipotent power, has simultaneously, from the beginning of time, created out of nothingness one kind of creature and another: spiritual and material beings” (Sobór Laterański IV 2007).

Today, the participation of the persons of the Trinity in the work of creation is most creatively presented in his concept by Jürgen Moltmann. According to him, God creates by the power of the word, which functions as a continuum between the Creator and His creation. The basis of creation is the person of Jesus Christ, who is the mediator of creation, the driving force of evolution and the world, and the saviour of evolution (Anderwald 2003). Christ mediates evolution (*Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*) through the Spirit and the Word. The Christ-Word specifies and at the same time differentiates by its action. The Spirit, on the other hand, unites and brings about unity, conformity and communion through His actual presence. Both aspects describe the mystery of God’s presence in the world, emphasising the mediation of Christ in creation, who confirms it and preserves it from corruption.

According to Moltman, a Trinitarian conception of creation makes it possible to unite God’s transcendence and immanence towards the world and protects against the danger of theological errors. Emphasising only God’s transcendence can lead to deistic interpretations. On the other hand, an overemphasis on immanence carries the danger of pantheism. The Trinitarian approach integrates the elements

of truth contained in both approaches and allows for a clear distinction between God the Creator and His creation. God is present in the world and permeates the whole of creation but retains His distinctiveness and transcendence. Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller seems to agree with this interpretation when he writes: “Between God’s transcendence and immanence there is an inversely proportional relationship. God can be immanent in relation to the world in an unparalleled way only because He is absolutely transcendent to it. God, being the innermost principle of being and movement in created reality makes my (...) its own causality. (...) God is the *causa prima*, which does not cancel the *causa secundae* of creatures (...), but makes them capable of autonomous action” (Müller 2016). The consequence of the modern desacralisation of the world is an ungodly embrace of nature and man’s devastating treatment of it. What is needed, therefore, is a reintegration of the vision of God and nature that can have a liberating effect on nature and man’s treatment of it (Moltmann 1995).

3. The perichoretic action of God - the Trinity

The work of creation comes from the almighty Father as the source and beginning of all being. However, it is also the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through the Son all things came into being; through Him the work of creation is continually actualised. “The creative activity of God in His word, which ... comes to us in the manner of Redemption, takes on a visible reality in Christ” (Müller 2016). In turn, the Holy Spirit, who is the Giver of Life, completes the act of creation – making it good and beautiful.

The unity of the action of the divine persons, in spite of their personal individualisation and separateness, is best expressed by the concept of perichoresis (Greek: *perichóresis*, Latin: *circumincessio*), developed in the Greek tradition, denoting the interpenetration of the divine persons

and their mutual indwelling. Introduced into the space of theological reflection by Gregory of Nazianzus and John of Damascus to explain problems in Christology, over time it became a technical term also in Western theology (Kochańczyk-Bonińska 2023). The term makes it possible to explain the unity of action of the God of the Trinity. The indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity in each other results in their joint action in both the work of creation and redemption. The unity of action of the Divine Persons results from the unity of their nature. For in God all things are one except for the opposing relations that identify the specific Persons of the Trinity.

The interaction of the Divine Persons in the Trinity in relation to the reality of the world is manifested by embracing the common love of creation. For God, in bringing His salvific economy to fruition, remains in an open and committed relationship to the world, incorporating the world into His inner dynamism. The image of the Trinitarian character of the creative act appears here as a communion of life, uniting first of all God and man, but also God’s relationship with the *theatrum mundi* in which the salvific economy is played out. The God-Trinity is in relationship with all creation, which he bestows love upon. This has a fundamental impact on man’s relationship with the world, which should be marked on the part of man by relations of solidarity and compassion (Lasek 2008).

In the created world, “substance identity has been communicated by the transcendental giver (the Creator) in such a way that a tendency to return to the Source has been established in the recipients” (Liszka 2008). This means that the essence of the creative act cannot be identified solely with the person of the Father but is the work of the whole Trinity. For it is found in the inner life of the Trinity: it is created by the Father giving birth to the Son and breathing the Holy Spirit, it is created by the Son born of the Father and breathing the Holy Spirit, and it is created by the Holy

Spirit breathed from the Father through the Son (Liszka 2008). Moreover, it signifies a permanent, because resulting from nature, inclinations to the continuance of the unity of Creator and creation (Kochańczyk-Bonińska 2022).

This understanding of creation brings a completely different character to the truth of creation and marks a fundamental change in the understanding of the relationship between God and creation that the Judaic conception of God proposes. The Triune God reveals His openness and involvement with the world. By directing Himself to the world, God makes creation the environment of divinity. This is a two-way relationship. For the world can also open itself to God, leading to a great community of life that includes God, man and all creation (Henry 2010). In this community there are no relations of domination, but, following the example of the divine persons, relations of solidarity and co-sensibility (Czackowska 1998).

For the persons of God are constituted in an eternal process of mutual love through an absolute giving and receiving of each other. As a result of the absolute will of God and in a way that is incomprehensible to us, this process went beyond the inner life of God in the act of creating man and the world. The Divine Persons embrace one another in love and in the same way embrace the whole of humanity and the world. They perfect creation as a whole by doing so (Silanes, 1992). The whole history of man and the natural world has a Trinitarian, perichoretic and teleological-eschatological dimension. The latter dimension means striving towards full union with the ultimate source, the substance of God (Sorci 2000).

Of particular relevance to ecotheological approaches is the possibility of applying a perichoretic understanding of the nature of God to a fuller and proper understanding of the relationship between God, humans and the world. Since “God not only has relations, God is a relation – a social Trinity” (Kohlhaas and McLaughlin 2019), it seems

fundamental to emphasise the importance of relations in ecotheological discourse. For since “all things are connected” (Francis 2015), seeing the interrelationships is an essential starting point for understanding the tasks of humans in relation to and in the world. Recognising the implications of human actions, interdependence or mutual conditioning of the processes taking place is a necessary condition for building a modern vision of man’s relationship to the natural world. This peculiar relational-centrism is theologically justified precisely by taking into account the category of perichoresis. It is what makes it possible to build the relationship between man and the world in analogy with the inner life of the Trinity (Kohlhaas and McLaughlin 2019).

4. Anthropological implications of Trinitarian theology of creation

The Trinitarian conception of creation as interpreted ecotheologically presented in this text seeks to portray the relationship between God and creation in the economy of salvation in a way that is specific to Catholic theology. The essential love between the persons of the Trinity and the profound relationship of love between the Triune God and creation carries an inspiring message for building, according to God’s design, man’s relationship to the world. Man, whom God places in the world, is called to happiness. He is to live in perfect harmony with God, himself and the natural world (Asolan 2022). This perspective finds its justification in the biblical view of man as the image of God (Gen 1:27) and his dominion over creation (Hajder 2020). The creation of man in the image of God, who is Trinity, implies the diverse and multidimensional relationality manifested in human existence. This is revealed in the description of man’s life in the Garden of Eden.

Man receives from God a concrete living space (the garden). The Creator provides him with the means of sustenance (the fruits of the garden), and specifies his role in the world, namely, to cultivate and tend

the garden. He also sets before man as a task to abide in a communal relationship (man and woman). This is realised in the context of social space, of which speech is a particular externalisation. This view of creation puts the question of likeness to God in a different perspective. It is not limited to the truth of creation understood as the origin of man in his existence and possession of certain qualities but takes into account his vital relationship with reality. This consequently implies the possibility of a broader and new perspective on the question of man's "dominion" over the world. For it takes into account the full specificity of human existence, manifested by belonging to the natural world while transcending the natural by virtue of being *imago Dei* (Asolan 2022).

Recognising the richness of human existence, which has its subjectivity in the creative plan of the Triune God, makes it possible to put the question of man's "dominion" over the world into a fuller perspective. It manifests itself in the creative response given to God through the externalisation of human intentions aimed at creation, the realisation of actions, the activation of creative invention. Thus, the truth about human freedom is revealed here (Urbančok 2008). In turn, this freedom is defined by human creativity, which must be recognised as a particular dimension of the image of the Trinity God in man.

Just as God's creative act is not subject to any external conditioning, human creativity must express itself in freedom and promote it. Its proper exercise implies a constant effort of fidelity to God's guidance, which is verified by the challenges constantly confronting man. These imply, on the one hand, the necessity of constantly resisting the temptations to overinterpret and overestimate one's rights in relation to creation, which stem from the weaknesses of human nature. More specifically, it is necessary to reject an egocentric and selfish perception of the reality, the abuse of power and violence against creation, treating creation as an object and its overexploitation. On

the other hand, there is a need on the part of man for wisdom in the use of the goods of nature in order to ensure a dignified existence, conditions for survival and development.

This proper use of the goods of nature is linked to an affirmation of the goodness of creation. It is intrinsically good because it is the work of God (Gen 1:9; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25; 1:31). Therefore, man's action in the world, if he wishes to manifest the truth about himself as *imago Dei*, cannot be other than respect for all that is good and beautiful in connection with care for its development. The enthusiasm with which the beauty and goodness of created things are affirmed implies respect for them. The discovery of the laws and order prevailing in creation generates respect for them and prompts us to preserve them and to take them into account in any action understood as the dominion of creation. This is confirmed by Pope John Paul II's interpretation of the prohibition on eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*: "Dominion, handed down by the Creator to man, does not mean absolute power, nor can there be any question of freedom to 'use' or dispose of things freely. The limitation imposed on man from the beginning by the Creator Himself and expressed in the symbolic prohibition to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (Gen 2:16-17) makes it clear that, with regard to visible nature, we are subject not only to biological but also to moral laws, which cannot be transgressed with impunity" (Jan Paweł II 1995, no. 42). Respect for nature and the preservation of the world is one of the many aspects of human activity, expressing its creativity. Its consideration is necessary for correct understanding of the eschatological dynamism of human life in the world, which determines its meaning and teleological sense.

Human creativity is linked in the Genesis narrative to divine blessing (Gen 1:28). The Old Testament concept of blessing is identical to the concept of peace

(Chrostowski 2012). In this sense, it indicates God's continuous action on behalf of man for his salvation, while peace denotes a state, a condition of salvation. The Beatitude, therefore, introduces, from the moment of creation and man, dynamism and direction, which find in His word the indications for activity and commitment, and in His action the answer to their realisation. Thus, man's action in the universe is creative insofar as it is constitutively and dynamically linked to God's creative action, and through the close connection of this action with salvation history, it receives a salvific vocation and power.

Conclusion

The Trinitarian conception of creation as interpreted ecotheologically presented in this text seeks to portray the relationship between God and creation in the economy of salvation in a way that is specific to Catholic theology. The cosmos appears as the "place" of God's transforming, divinizing and sanctifying *actio*, in which each of the Persons of the Trinity acts in its own way. The whole of creation exists in God, open to His action and enriched by God's triune existence. The existence of the world, which is an expression of the special love of the Triune God, gives created reality a special meaning and value. The inner life of the Trinity finds its analogy in the existing world order. Indeed, the triune God is the model and deepest source of the relationality of creatures.

The analysis of trinitarian issues in an ecological perspective becomes the basis for creating praxeological indications in the construction of the relationship between God, man and the world. Theological praxeology means the application of theoretical considerations first into the space of practical theology and then into the mentality and functioning of human beings. It is particularly relevant today. Ecotheological concepts must not become mere academic discourses. The mystery of the Trinity has great potential in this regard. The inner life of God, in

which there is no subordination or domination, and the relationship of giving is inseparable from receiving, can become an impulse to redefine the usual patterns of thinking about making the earth subject to oneself.

Also, the notion of perichoresis, which characterises the inner life of the Trinity, seems to be an excellent model in capturing the relationality of creatures. Recognising the relationality of creatures, who are the image of God, could mitigate the excessive anthropocentrism of theology and contribute to the inclusion of a broader cognitive and interpretive perspective. In this context, the postulate of theological relationality seems to be particularly creative and promising in ecotheology. The relationality of the inner life of the God of the Trinity is reflected in the inner relationality of the world. "The Divine Persons are relational in their own right, and the world created in the image of God is a network of relationships" (Francis 2015). The contemplation of the intrinsic communion of the Divine Persons, the essence of which is love, can provide the impetus for a loving overflow of human reference to the world.

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