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The Man and the Virtue of Humbleness. Orthopraxy as an effect of the Love of Creation (Environment)

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Abstract. Being created by God out of love, man, by the rationality with which he was endowed, understands how he must relate both to His Creator and to all created things, for although he is the crown of creation, that is, the one for whom they have all have been done, yet he cannot afford to destroy the environment of manifestation of the relationship between him and God.

Keywords. Humility, creation, man, environmental protection

Introduction

Speaking of orthopraxy as a result of orthodox faith and thought, we cannot fail to identify the greatest virtue as that of humility, modesty, and goodwill contained in the love of Christ. The foundation of the practices of environmental protection that we encounter in the lives of the Saints is that of the humble soul and the good measure by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is poured out. The saints sometimes urge meekness, sometimes command it, and sometimes inspire and express respect for the environment created and preserved by the grace and providence of God. They keep the peace with the world around them, which they thus lead to a reconciling atmosphere, by the will and desire of God from the beginning.

Moreover, man is powerless in his individual attempt to attain reconciliation with the Creator, whom he has offended and wounded with his sin¹, a reconciliation that is accomplished in time, "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4: 4), through the only sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God. „The personal relationship between man and the trinitarian God is developed in the ecclesiastical framework through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through this work, each believer experiences the communion based on love and obedience to God, through a lively relationship and by any means not through a mediation over an impersonal principle or idea. Through this one can observe the greatness of the theandry of the Church”².

¹ New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2000, pg. 551

² Petrov, G. D. (2021). The hypostatic union – the foundation of the theandry of the Church. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 22(1), 804–811. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v22i1.4364>

I. The relationship between man and creation

Undoubtedly, in the relationship of the Saints with the environment, whether we refer to plants or animals, man sometimes plays a dominant role, but always the saint with a pure heart and open to the will of God, acts in moderation, depending on each case separately. Such a case is represented by the Law of Ammun, whose life we read in the Dictionary of All Saints, where we learn that he was a true lover of men and humble, and when his disciples were asked to kill a dragon that lived in a cave, which had caused more damage, he replied that he could not do it "out of humility". But at last, the right man entered the cave, and sitting down to pray, he said, "May the Lord put you to death; by law Ammun)"³. From this word we understand the humility of the saints, which must be a characteristic of human nature, a personal characteristic that does not allow pride to believe that man has the right to intervene in God's creation, a creation that is permanently in His possession.

The saints lived in confidence that the environment is a unique and wonderful gift from God the Creator, as a proof of His direct love for His last creature, man. This teaching is also beautifully described by Father Cosmas, in his teachings: greens, plants, fountains, rivers, seas, fish, air, day, night, fire, sky, stars, sun, moon. Who did all this for? For us. What did he owe us? Nothing. All as a gift were given"⁴. In other words, God, being indebted to the crown of creation, that is, to man, offers him all the gifts that have one source: the love of the Creator. This love is fully manifested in the act of creation, and its meaning is amplified in the act of the sacrifice of the Logos, without which man and implicitly through him creation, would have remained alienated from God, because of the sin of the former.

The humility of the environment and, of course, of the earth, is highlighted especially by Saint Paisie, who says that although she is trampled on by all, she lifts them up with her love and feeds them like a loving mother. Moreover, he accepts without complaint all the materials that man throws away, either dirty garbage or good fruit, turning them into vitamins that are again given without discrimination to all people, both good and bad. Therefore, the saint blesses the people who by their humility resemble the humble earth⁵.

The humility we refer to here is also shown in the word of Isaac the Syrian, which, moreover, is perceived by all living things of God. Such a case is also the case of the paradisiacal state described in the life of the righteous Paul of Obnora, who was seen by a visitor in the forests of Russia in the 15th century. 15th century, surrounded by various animals and birds that sat on his shoulders and fed them with his hands. Next to him sat a bear waiting to be fed by the hermit. All this time, all the animals - foxes, rabbits, wolves, and other animals - roamed around the saint without any enmity towards each other and without fear of the bear⁶. The paradisiacal state in which the relationship between man and the other elements of creation was in perfect harmony, is highlighted after the fall of man, through the life and work of the Saints of God, in which wild animals see and know the Face of the Creator.

The complete lack of wickedness and purity of the saints makes even the worst and most dangerous animals of the forest, their humble friends, in an association that anyone would dare to consider as taken out of a fairy tale. A characteristic example is that of St. Seraphim of Sarov, whose friend in the forest where he was needed was a bear, whom he also fed with bread from his own hand, but whom he also allowed his visitors to feed⁷. But the saint showed constant

³ Z. Mollotos, Dicționar al Tutorilor Sfinților Bisericii Ortodoxe, Atena, 1904, pg. 160

⁴ I. Menounos, Părintele Cosma, ed. Tinos, Atena, 1969, pag. 121-122.

⁵ D. Tatsis, Ascetul Panagoudei, Ed. Stamoulis, Atena, 2000, pg. 118.

⁶ Serafim Monahul, Harismele și Hraismaticii, Ed. Sf. Mănăstire Paraklitu, Oropos, 1987, pg. 261.

⁷ I. Gorainova, Viața și Profetețiile Sfântului Serafim de Sarov, Ed. Andreas, Bucuresti, 2000, pg. 10.

respect and love for nature and the environment, being in full harmony with it, living in the heart of the forest, where he cared for his own forest completely naturally⁸. This is one of the models that can be mentioned, where the first cooperation, between God who created everything and the man who is put by Him to give a name to all those created, is expressed in human words.

Thus, from humility born of love, which is the epicenter of Orthodox thought, we reach the orthopraxy of environmental actions, present in the Lives of the Saints, and the harmony with it. This is the form of the creature's love for God's creation. "Such knowledge presupposes a form of purification, of getting out of any passion so that man is not subject to any limitation"⁹.

II. From humility to orthopraxy

There are many examples of orthopraxis in the Lives of the Saints that testify to the positive disposition and closeness to nature and the environment, through love and humility. It is known, through the prism of many sources, the example of the life of St. Amphilochus of Patmos, who took special care of the trees and recognized their ecological value and importance. He considered his love of trees to be one of the commandments of Christ, which did not remain in the scriptural tradition. His love of nature did not remain at the stage of theoretical concept but was also put into practice. By his example, the Saint determined the inhabitants of the island to plant young seedlings, which they cared for and watered during the summer, when the drought was most severe¹⁰. In a few years, through involvement and hard work, the island was unrecognizable. Saint Cozma the Aetolian, who left us the famous prophecy about trees and the ecological crisis, which he considers to be the consequences of spiritual poverty: People will remain poor because they will not have love of trees¹¹.

The truth of the prophecy of Saint Cozma the Aetolian is the culmination of the whole teaching about love and respect that we must show to the environment, but at the same time, the implementation of this love, things actually materialized either by planting trees or replacing many of these.

In the Lives of the Saints it is constantly emphasized, which the conscience of the Church has continuously expressed over time in all its manifestations: the fact that man's relationship with the environment is a relationship of cooperation, man taking care of the greatest good on which God gave him. After all, each creation is nothing but a separate expression of His pronouncing and creative energy and wisdom. Therefore, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, man becomes the custodian of all the Works of the Almighty God¹².

The saints, before acting, start from a great statement about the environment, which, in its essence, is the affirmation and full acceptance of God the Creator. They let themselves be carried away by His sweet embrace, marveling and doxologizing the divine beauty through the prism of creation. St. Paisie, seeing the trees and all that was in the forest, spoke of the Wisdom

⁸ I. Popovici, *Viața Sf. Serafim de Sarov*, ed. Grădina Maicii Domnului, Tesalonic, 1985, pg. 6.

⁹ Petrov, G. D. (2021). The apophatic knowledge in philosophy and theology. Emil Cioran Versus Dumitru Staniloae. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 21(1), 840–845. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v21i1.3702>

¹⁰ P. Nikitaras, *Gheronda Amfilohia Makris: O Personalitate contemporană a Patmosului (1888-1970)*, Atena, 1984, pg. 47-49.

¹¹ Cozma Etolos, *Profetii*, Ed. Dimiourgia, Atena, 1998, pg. 38

¹² The Book of Psalms, 8, 5-9: Thou hast humbled him with a little angel, and hast magnified and crowned him with glory. Thou hast put him above the work of thy hands; thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. Sheep and oxen, all; even the cattle of the field; the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, which pass through the paths of the seas. O Lord our God, how wonderful is thy name in all the earth!

of God, of the simplicity and harmony which he sowed in creation, with "His divine hand, without the use of any skillful stitch or boulder"¹³.

Saint Porphyry told the story, marveling and full of emotion, about a nightingale that sang continuously in the trees of the Holy Mountain. He felt "with all," as he put it, being visited by the Divine Grace. He urged everyone to deepen the role and purpose of creation, which is set by the Creator. And because of this thinking and his love for watchmen and other birds in general, given that they need a lot of water for a good life, he wanted to build a two-cubic-meter tank of water between the pines¹⁴, and from the humble thought of the beginning, he later turned to the loving practice.

Through the humble prayers of the saints and the virtue of their lives, even the wild beasts were tamed. One such case is the life of the Holy Martyr Vlasie, Archbishop of Sevastia, who, while praying in the cave, was surrounded not only by people but also by wild beasts, who did not want to leave him before the Saint - He put his hand on their head as a sign of blessing¹⁵.

At another time in the life of St. Vlasie, we read that through his prayers, not only the people who came to him received healing, but also various animals. It is worth noting in connection with the life of the Saint and a miracle performed while the Saint was going, surrounded by soldiers, to be imprisoned. On that way, a poor woman, whose only fortune was a pig that had been abducted by a wolf, came to the saint, asking for his help. After the Saint reassured her and prayed to God for the woman's deliverance from this trouble, the wolf forgot his natural behavior and returned to the woman with the pig¹⁶.

A noteworthy example of the love and love of animals, where the Saint shows his compassion, treating and healing a wounded animal, we find in the Mine of March, when the right of Gerasim the Jordanian is commemorated. Thus, we are informed, according to the Great Sinaxar of Doukakis, about this incident in the Life of the Right Father, which took place near the banks of a river. There, the saint met a roaring lion, being wounded, asking for help. Right-handed Gherasim approached the animal and found that a sharp rod had penetrated the unfortunate animal's leg and immediately rushed to remove the foreign body and heal it¹⁷. The lion became "like a meek lamb," beginning to follow the saint in gratitude. At the time of his transition to the eternal, the lion was in a different place than the Saint. Returning, therefore, the lion back to the place where the Saint lived and not finding him there, he began to mourn and roar, desiring to see him again. Seeing him, a disciple took him to the place where Father Gerasim was buried, and the lion, seeing his master and friend in the grave, knelt before the tomb, and died.

Conclusions

Concluding this paper, it can be said that in the Lives of the Saints we often encounter elements of nature that are subject to the will of the Right Fathers, which in turn represent the divine will. These extraordinary cases in which animals and plants help different saints and do according to the will of God, helping the saint in question in the battle, or during his martyrdom, by the Grace of God, are many, and therefore, concluding, we will list an example for both

¹³ Paisie Aghioritul, Cuvântări: Cu durere și dragoste față de omul zilelor noastre, Vol. I, Ed. Sfintei Sihastrii a Sfântului Evanghelist Ioan Teologul, Salonic, 2003, pg. 129.

¹⁴ Porfirie Kavsoikalavitul, Viața și Cuvântări, Sf. Mănăstire Hrisopighis, Hania, 2003, pg. 463.

¹⁵ K. Doukakis, Slujba Completă, Viața și Martiriul Sfântului Sfințitului Mucenic Vlasie, Ed. Stamoulis, Atena, 1896, pg. 28-29.

¹⁶ K. Doukakis, Slujba Completă, Viața și Martiriul Sfântului Sfințitului Mucenic Vlasie, Ed. Stamoulis, Atena, 1896, pg. 29.

¹⁷ K. Doukakis, Marele Sinaxar, Luna Martie, Ed. A. Kollarakis și N. Triantafillou, Atena, 1894, pg. 39-40.

cases, both in relation to the animal world and the plant world. In the Sinaxar of August we find a reference to the Holy Martyr Anichit, who worked hard to confess his faith in Christ and to denigrate all the idolaters present. Eventually, wanting to kill him, they sent a furious, fast-eating lion upon him, with a terrifying roar. But, as the beast approached the saint, he calmed down like a sheep, clearing the sweat of fear from the saint's face, being with him, thus, in his sufferings¹⁸.

On the other hand, the natural environment, trees, and other plants also take part in the divine desire that is expressed after the prayers of the Saints, through their blessings and intercession, especially regarding very important issues, such as the prohibition of women to climb Mount Athos. This is the example of the life of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, who, taking the blessing from the abbot of Sarov, Isaiah, tried to remove the temptations due to the visits of women to the Holy Mountain, so as not to fool either the brothers or the laity. For this, he introduced the ban still valid in the Holy Mountain, so that women do not enter and do not dream of this place of asceticism. Then, as we read in the prayers to the Most Holy Mother of God, the trees bent their branches, obeying God's will¹⁹.

Man, therefore, through prayer and asceticism, comes to be in full communion with God and His creation, this relationship being based on the virtues of love and humility. Creation, in turn, seeing the face of the Creator in the crown of creation, also responds with humility, obeying the divine will.

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¹⁸ Nicodim Aghioritul, Sinaxarul celor douăsprezece luni de peste an, Vol. II, Ed. H. Nikolaidou, Atena, 1868, pg. 312.

¹⁹ I. Popovici, Viața Sf. Serafim de Sarov, ed. Grădina Maicii Domnului, Tesalonic, 1985, pg. 8.

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