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Ekoteologia

Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska*

Ekoteologia

by Jarosław Babiński, Oficyna Wydawnicza
ASPRA-JR: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Nauki
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Nowadays, definitely nobody doubts the significance of ecological problems. The issues associated therewith affect the functioning of contemporary man and have found a prominent place in the reflection on the world pursued in various sciences, journalism, as well as the popular cultural discourse. Given its origins, a natural plane for carrying out ecological reflection are biological and natural sciences, though it has long gone beyond their limits and has become an integral element of scientific reflection actually in every area of knowledge. It is therefore by no means a surprise that ecological problems have also inspired theological thought. Germinally it appeared in theology in connection with its articulation of social issues and then it developed – as a response to the discernment of the signs of the times postulated by the Second Vatican Council – in the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church and the reflection of theologians primarily during the pontificates of the three last popes: John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. Ecotheology has found its due place among other theological disciplines. In this context, interesting seems to be the monograph *Ekoteologia* (Ecotheology) authored by Father Jarosław Babiński – professor at the Theological Faculty of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

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Babiński's monograph is undoubtedly a very much needed book. Until its publication, there had not been any comprehensive study in Polish theological literature showing ecological problems in the aspect of dogmatic theology. It was realised most fully in the third, most important and most extensive chapter of the treatise entitled *Ecodogmatics*. In the opinion of the author, which is hard not to be shared, dogmatic theology is the most crucial among all theological disciplines as it formulates doctrinal foundations of faith. Outlining his visions of the ecotheological problem the author situates it in an unequivocal reference to theological anthropology and develops it in the major spaces of traditionally systematised dogmatic theology. They are delimited by: creation science, christology and eschatology. Obviously, it is not a closed formula. Building an integral vision of the ecotheological problem, the author unhesitatingly reaches out to other sections of systematic theology, pointing out their tangency and complementarity in a principles, ecological and theological narration. He himself expounds on certain issues and shows the possibilities of their further in-depth treatment.

The publication offers an extremely interesting and positive vision of the ecological problem. Basing on the theology of creation, the author presents the special mission of man in the world which God has entrusted to him as a place for growth and development. He is to have dominion over it, which means responsible usage of its assets, reading of God's intentions by man and participation in *creatio continua* – use of its resources through creation of culture and civilisation with the awareness that the world has been given to him as a lease rather than as his property. Father Babiński clearly outlines here the teaching of the Church, which has been many a time accused of legitimising a thoughtless and predatory attitude towards creation. The vision of man as a keeper of the world by God's will becomes further integrated and confirmed by Jesus Christ, who through the mystery of His Redemption has given the world the status of "new creation", the destiny of which is to partake in the reality of "new heaven and earth". From the eschatological point of view it means participation of all creation in everlasting happiness and its transformation.

The main aim the author of the monography set for himself was to develop a comprehensive eco-dogmatic vision. This does not mean, however, that this is the sole dimensions of his investigations. Of interest are also the analyses of both the methodological as well as the theological-historical character. As regards the former, it is discussed in the first chapter

of the monograph. The author outlines in it the genesis of environmental studies, the multidimensional development of which generated autonomously conceived ecotheology and ecophilosophy. We see here an attempt to specify the competences, extent and method of ecological studies undertaken in theology and philosophy, special consideration being given to an ever more intensely voiced postulate to build a comprehensive and multidimensional vision of significant scientific questions – that is so-called transdisciplinarity. Regardless of the latter, ecotheology appears as a new, extremely important and autonomous discipline of theological sciences.

Another look at ecotheology is an attempt to outline its evolution, which is to be found in Chapter two. The author tries to present the development of the theological thought in the Catholic Church, analysing the teachings of consecutive pontiffs. The beginnings of the teaching on ecology in the Church should be seen – in the opinion of the author – in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII, dedicated to social issues. The original intuitions were developed at the time of the Second Vatican Council (pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI), to assume a comprehensive character in the teaching of John Paul II (especially in the *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 1990* – a theological résumé of the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church on ecology). Then he presents the main ecological topics in the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI, once hailed as “the green pope”, to close this historical review with the pontificate of Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato si*.

This extensive introduction is a point of departure to constructing a dogmatic vision of ecology (which has been already described above). However, the author does not stop there. This integral vision of ecotheology becomes a point of departure for showing its praxeological implications. This is expounded on in chapter four. The first issue discussed therein is the problem of the so-called ecological sin, that is showing the need to build individual and public awareness of responsibility which always accompanies human activities and the consequences of which are also of an ecological nature. There is a need – in the author’s opinion – to make man aware of the negative effects of his behaviour effecting from either thoughtless or greedy and egoistical use of natural resources. The awakening of awareness of the existence of ecological sin should be accompanied by positive education. Herein the author sees special responsibilities of the theological ecological discourse in awakening awareness, mentality and pro-ecological attitudes. At the same time, he also perceives the dangers of ex-

treme solutions brought about by the temptation to ideologise ecological ideas since it turns into ecologism.

The approach to ecotheology proposed in Babiński's book appears to be cohesive and comprehensive. It situates this subject in the realm of theological discipline, showing its origins and relationships with other fields of science dealing with ecological issues. This is important for identifying the opportunities for mutual inspiration, cooperation and development. Babiński's book has been based on an extensive foreign bibliography guaranteeing in-depth elaboration of the investigated subject. This abundant bibliography may also offer valuable help in further quests for people interested in ecotheology.

Summing up, Jarosław Babiński's *Ekoteologia* is a valuable scientific monograph. However, it is by no means a hermetic study. It may be helpful for those who are professionally engaged in theology, but may also offer an interesting reading for everyone who is interested in knowing the theological approach to ecological issues and thus expand the horizon of this important and topical problem.