

3-2019

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Recommended Citation

Cacanaska, Ruzhica; Lazarevski, Pande PhD; Matlievska, Margarita PhD; Dauti, Hanif; Chatleska,, Vesna Zabijakin PhD; Gjorgjevski, Gjoko PhD; and Zvrleska, Duca (2019) "Moral Teachings in the Holy Books, the Bible and the Quran, About the Relationship of the Human to Nature: A Macedonian Research Project," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol39/iss2/2>

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MORAL TEACHINGS IN THE HOLY BOOKS, THE BIBLE AND THE QURAN, ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE HUMAN TO NATURE: A MACEDONIAN RESEARCH PROJECT¹

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¹Prepared as a part of the project with same title, conducted by TORDIS – Society for Promoting Partnerships and Development at Civil Society and supported by the Ministry of environment and physical planning (agreement number 08-3168/1).

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Abstract

The subject matter of this manuscript is the separation and actualization of the thematic areas of the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, in which the human-nature relationship is elaborated, indicated or specified. The emphasis is on the moral teachings contained in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, which, refer to the human–nature relationship and their influence on the development of ecological awareness in that context, are supported by or grounded in the holy books. The empirical research point to the conclusion is that religion is an important source or basis of morality, and it determines the attitude of humans to nature. In that sense, religious collectivities/communities can and should be much more involved in issues related to environmental protection.

Key words: Bible; Quran; moral teachings; ecological crisis; public religion.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Man should realize that nature with its goods is still limited and that it should be reasonably and with great responsibility served with them ... All must develop the awareness that man saving the nature saves himself, but also the others.”

M. Bishop

“Saving the World: An Ecological Problem,” Bogoslovska Smotra, no. 4, 1982, p. 592.

The question of the human-nature relationship becomes more actual with the rise of the ecological crisis. The question is, how did the human treat, does treat, and should treat nature?

Will humans treat it as their inheritance from their ancestors, or will they act like it is something they have borrowed from their heirs? How much do humans possess, and with great seriousness, do they address the issues of their relationship towards the environment within the cultural framework or the way of modern living? Or, are they still at such a level of awareness that they act chaotically, carelessly, and irresponsibly? The globalization trend of modern living², accelerated by technological and information systems, imposes the question of peace but also threatens the destruction of the natural environment.³

The severity of the ecological crisis warns that “the past behavior of the human race towards its co-inhabitants⁴ and the environment ... leads to very serious consequences because of which the man himself, as well as the environment in which he exists, is in danger of destruction.”⁵ The increasingly polluted nature, that is, the disturbed ecological balance, seriously warns about the striking consequences in the nearer, and also, the more distant future. Due to the fact that humans and their behavior are seemingly the main culprit, they are also a key factor in resolving the ecological crisis. There is a need for taking strategic steps in developing ecological awareness and conscience.

Undoubtedly, religions and their holy books contain information that specifically relates to environmental issues, whether it is about the genesis, current life or the future. The holy books are a treasury of different experiences and lessons that can influence and direct human behavior towards nature and its resources.

²The slogan of the ecological campaign reads: *Think globally and act locally*.

³Ali Kirman. *Religious and secularist views on the nature and the environment*, Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi *The Journal Of International Social Research* Volume 1/3 Spring 2008, p. 267. “In fact, we have been faced with the widespread destruction of the environment.”

⁴Whether they are close to him or distant and unknown to him, they belong to the human race.

⁵Djurica Pardon, *Oholost gospodovanja, manipuliranja i prekomjernog iskorištavanja*, Biblijski i teološki pogledi na čovjekov oholi stav prema Zemlji i Bogu (*Arrogance of Management, Manipulation and Excessive Exploitation; Biblical and theological views of a man's arrogant attitude towards the Earth and God*), , *Vjesnik* 499, May 2014 , p. 31, https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/699541.Oholost_gospodovanja_-_Vjesnik_5_14.pdf, accessed on 10.05.2018.

At the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 2:15), it is stated: "And the LORD God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden, to work it and keep it." Or in Psalm 115:16, it is strictly emphasized: "The heavens are the heaven of the Lord's: but the earth he has given to the children of men." In other verses (Deuteronomy 20:19-20) it is recommended: "When you siege a city for a long time, to conquer it and rule it, do not cut its trees that are in the forest, but use their fruits for food, and do not devastate the environment, because the tree in the field is not a man, to escape from you in the fortress." Proverbs 12:10 states: "A good man takes care of his animals, but wicked men are cruel to theirs."

In the Quran, a significant place is dedicated to the earth, heaven, trees, plants, and animals ... "And to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is Ever Encompassing all things" (En-Nisa 4:126). Any abuse of any living being or natural resource is considered a sin in Islam. Allah's Messenger says, "You are all shepherds, and you will all be asked ..." Allah's Messenger often spoke of ... the nature and everything that is in it. In one important *hadith*, it is emphasized that if the Day of Judgment comes, and someone has a seedling and is able to plant it, let him plant it. "The one who cultivates the earth will be rewarded." "A Muslim who will plant a tree or plant a seed, and his fruits will be eaten by birds, humans, or animals, it will be regarded as a Sadaka (Sadaqah)" (Hadith, Bukhari III:513).

However, we should emphasize that the narrative in religion often begins with the *fight against the pollution of the spiritual environment*. In fact, religious knowledge opens the believer's field of vision and creates the foundations of the world view of the believer, and at the same time directs his or her pragmatic behavior in life in general.

Taking into account the dramatic indicators of the degree of pollution (or destruction) of nature and, of course, developing the strategy for the future, religion should basically direct

humans to change their attitude towards nature, primarily creating norms for its protection. Some theologians, sociologists, and philosophers emphasize that religions very clearly and pragmatically underline their attitude towards nature, the environment, the living world in general and, of course, the role of the human being. The process of secularization, on the one hand, and the deprivatization of religion or its public role, on the other hand, are modeling the role of religion in the sphere of social activities and morality. In this context, the issue of ethics and the environment is unavoidable.

Knowledge of religions, especially the study of holy books, and focusing specifically on the quotations that build the relationship to nature will give a firm foundation to one's world view and basic life values. In the truest sense of the word, it can direct the behavior of the person towards the environment. The authority and values in the holy books, which were provided over the centuries, will be an extraordinary resource for raising human's ecological awareness and for the preservation of nature for future generations.

In this context, it would also be important to point out the key determinants of the very concept of ecology. The word ecology is of Greek origin and is composed of *oikos*, which means home or environment, and *logos*, a science.⁶ Thus ecology simply means studying the environment or the environment of living. Ecology is divided into three parts: ecology of plants, ecology of animals, and human ecology. Accordingly, human ecology focuses on the study of the relationship of the human being toward the living and inanimate nature.⁷

Human ecology has been rapidly developed in recent years because humans are considered major culprits for the ecological crisis and, certainly, for endangering our own future and the future of the next generations. At the same time, humans are also the ones who must take

⁶The term ecology is for the first time mentioned in the Natural History of Creation (1866) by Ernst Haeckel.

⁷Danilo Ž. Marković, *Socijalna ekologija (Social Ecology)*, (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2005).

serious steps to face the ecological crisis and human survival. Raising ecological awareness, based on the religious heritage grounded in the holy books and the moral lessons derived thereof, can significantly affect facing the ecological crisis and taking decisive steps for its timely mitigation.

II. THEORETICAL BASES

Do not blame Nature!

She made her, and now you do what you need to do!

John Milton

The public role of religion⁸ addresses two important issues of modern Macedonian religious life: engagement in the sphere of morality and, of course, the social sphere.

The public discourse often speaks about the connection between religion and morality, which indicates that religion should be the “source” of moral behavior and should assist in overcoming the present crisis of values. The modern religious polarization of morality is grounded in the concept of public religion suggesting that religion should provide appropriate support of the individual and public morality in society.⁹ Professor Ratomir Grozdanovski in his review of the crisis in the Church says, “this crisis should make the Church more resistant, more spiritual, more ethical and it should strengthen the faith within its leadership, clergy, among its believers and finally, among the unbelievers ... Thus, it should establish moral, ethical values, ...

⁸Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. (Chicago/ London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹R. Cacanaska,, “Religious Changes in Macedonian Society,” *Facta Universitatis*, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History, Vol. 15, No 1, 2016, <http://casopisi.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/FUPhilSocPsyHist/article/view/1703/1288>, Accessed on 12.03.2017.

more precisely, practical knowledge of life--faith and morality shown and proven in life... the church must practically demonstrate nurturing of moral values....”¹⁰

The characteristic features of religion in the period after the independence of Macedonia is certainly the process of revitalization¹¹ which encompasses the revitalization and strengthening of the position of religious entities. This consists primarily of those which are historically present, majority collectivities, which can be monitored at the level of religious collectivity and at the individual level through religious beliefs and individual practice. Deprivatization of religion, i.e., the penetration of religion on the public stage, is reflected directly and very clearly through its significantly larger presence in the media; its activities and wide presence in social media; demonstrating aspirations to "religious education" and adapting to changing social conditions; undertaking certain activities in the sphere of social policy; significant influence in the field of morality; presenting their views on various issues of interest to the community; etc.¹² The empirical records determine the religious population according to personal religious identification as highly religious. Religious practice is not "added" to the individual religious determination. Namely, in terms of practice, the Macedonian believers are defined dominantly as "customary," followed by practicing the most important religious holidays (which are non-working days), as well as celebrating the major, special events of their life.

¹⁰R.Grozdanovski .” Sekularizam i sekularizacija” (Secularism and secularisation), lecture at a one-day forum, with leading professors and scholar, on 25 June 2007, in Skopje, http://www.rgrozdanovski.mk/index2php?option=com_content&tas. Accessed on 21 February 2013.

¹¹According to the Constitutional Act of the Republic of Macedonia, churches, religious communities and religious groups are part of the non-profit sector. They are allowed to establish religious schools, as well as to act in the sphere of social policy through opening social and charitable institutions. The Constitution mentions the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Jewish Community.

¹²R. Cacanaska,, “Religious Polarization in Contemporary Macedonian Society,” Chapter VIII in the book, *The Role of Religion during the Yugoslav State Crisis*, Ed. Branislav Radeljic, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 121-123.

Ethics basically deals with the study of morality and, certainly, the basic concepts of what is good and proper. Environmental ethics is "a moral learning inspired by ecosophic and ecological knowledge of the value of the elements that surround the human being in his life and are important to him, as well as of the noble preservation and promotion of the living conditions, the goal of which is the overall improvement of the survival of people and of other living beings on Earth."¹³ Environmental ethics focuses on the understanding, attention, preservation, and promotion of the human environment and its elements.¹⁴ Ethicists point out that moral norms should guide human behavior towards nature, develop awareness of the importance of nature, and they should specifically emphasize the responsibility that humans have in their treatment of nature. Ecological awareness is based on ecological knowledge, the evaluation of environmental conditions, and, of course, ecological behavior.

III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research project entitled, "Moral Lessons in the Holy Books, the Quran and the Bible about the man-nature relationship," was accomplished in several phases. In the first phase, the research idea was specified (research questions and a draft research) and the research instrument was drafted. In the next phase, testing of the research instrument was made. Thereafter, the semi-structured interview was finalized and the research sample was prepared. Interviewing was conducted within a two-month time frame. After the interviewing, a formal and logical control of the empirical material was made. This research report or study was prepared on the basis of the thematic analysis of the empirical material.

¹³ K. Temkov,, *How to be good*, (Skopje; OHO, 2009), p. 181.

¹⁴Ibid.

Within this project, empirical qualitative research was made in order to separate the key points that describe the man-nature relationship in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran. Accordingly, it points to the key moral lessons of which the holy books teach us about the human-nature relationship, as well as their implementation in the lives of the religious collectivities and their believers.

The subject matter of this project is the separation and actualization of the thematic areas of the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, which process, point out, or indicate the human-nature relationship. In addition, emphasis is put on the moral lessons found in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, about the human-nature relationship, and in that context, the influence on the development of ecological awareness, which, among other things, will be supported or based on the holy books. The next stages of our work on this topic, or in the follow-up of this project, will be aimed at the gradual concrete actualization of environmental topics in the various activities of the religious collectivities themselves, such as regular services, work with respective groups, elaboration of the topics in the public, and showing their own example through good environmental practices. At the same time, we would suggest increased gradual insertion of these topics into curricula and contents in educational structures.

a) Research Questions

Based on the insights into the available secondary database (from different sources) and the review of the relevant literature, the following research questions were formulated, which served as a guide to collecting the primary database:

1. In general, how and to what degree do the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, pay attention to the human- nature relationship?

2. What are the key quotations in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, which describe the human–nature relationship?¹⁵
3. What are the key moral lessons that the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, teach us about the human–nature relationship?
4. What is the ecological awareness of the believers in general?
5. What is the ecological awareness of the believers of your religious collectivity?
6. What is the role of religious collectivities in the modern Macedonian society in terms of creating public morality or dominant values in facing the present ecological crisis?
7. In your opinion, what is the role of the leadership of the religious collectivity regarding the questions about the human–nature relationship, that is, in the direction of raising the ecological awareness among members of different religious collectivities?

b) Research Design

The research design in this project is cross-sectional.¹⁶ The collection of empirical records took place in a precisely determined time interval, from July 15 to September 15, 2018.

In this project, we used an on-line individual interview as a method for collecting empirical data. The sample was purposefully stratified and the respondents from the religious collectivities were persons who have completed a higher theological education, regardless of what function or role they had in the religious collectivity. The prepared interview was sent by e-mail to approximately 70 representatives of religious collectivities. Only 22 respondents completed the interview and returned it to the research team. The response rate of the semi-structured interview was about 30 percent. Accordingly, the research sample was composed of 22 respondents.

¹⁵To quote and briefly describe up to five spots that are considered most important.

¹⁶ A. Bryman, , *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 59.

The basics of the interview was explained to the potential respondents in the e-mail which was sent to them, as well as in the interview. The interviewees were previously informed on the basic information about the project and the interview, and they were asked for informative consent for interviewing, which was obtained. All interviewed persons were guaranteed anonymity, as well as adequate protection of the information and views expressed in the answers, and of course their keeping, processing, and interpretation or presentation.

c) Processing and Presentation

The sample was composed of three women and 19 men who were interviewed. Interviewees have completed higher theological education, and they were 28 to 67 years old. Only one of the interviewees did not specify his or her age. Of all interviewees, 12 were speaking about the Holy Bible, while eight were speaking about the Quran. Two interviewees, for a part of the questions, presented their perception of both holy books.

The interviews were completed and returned to the research team, which opened the following topics:

- Part of the interviews were not fully completed. Thus, the research team decided those interviews lacking more than half of the answers were not to be taken into account for the analysis of empirical records. Such interviews were only three.
- Regarding the sample of completed interviews that were taken into account for the analysis, some of them omitted parts of the answers or answers to certain questions were incomplete. There were five such interviews.
- In two interviews, the interviewees grouped two questions and provided one answer.

The collected empirical records allowed for creation of a "proper in-depth representation" of the perception and explanation of the human–nature relationship according to the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, by the surveyed population.¹⁷

Regarding epistemology, it should be emphasized that this project was aimed to contextualize knowledge and understanding¹⁸ of the main topics (categories) of the research questions. The analysis of the qualitative database focused on quoting the key quotations in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, which refer to the human–nature relationship, as well as to the extraction of the appropriate moral messages. In addition, the perception of the interviewed population about the ecological awareness of the believers and the role of the leadership of the religious collectivities regarding the development of the ecological awareness was also analyzed.

In interpreting and presenting the qualitative empirical basis, the authors, at their own discretion, synthesized certain issues and presented them as synthetic indicators, while other points from the answers of the interviewees were listed in their original format (as they were written). The quotations of the interviewees were used as proof of their attitude, an opportunity to better understand the key concept of change; at the same time those were in function of the findings and conclusions of the paper itself. However, it should be borne in mind that a distinction prevailed in the answers, that is, the originality of the vocabulary which was used and the way attitudes or experiences were presented. Nevertheless, in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, the authors made minor corrections when presenting the data. In certain topics (categories), there is saturation or repetition to some extent, while in other topics there was less saturation, which was noticeable during the stratification of the answers.

¹⁷ W. L. Newman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (Pearson New International Edition, Seventh Edition, Pearson Education Limited 2014), p. 44.

¹⁸ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, pp. 28-31.

IV. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL MATERIALS

The presentation of the research report is made according to the research questions set out in the draft research.

1. THE HUMAN - NATURE RELATIONSHIP FOUND IN THE HOLY BOOKS

The first thematic block of the interview was related to the perception of the respondents regarding the representation of the topics of the human–nature relationship in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran. According to the answers of the respondents, it was notable that there was a greater representation of the answers that the holy books paid much attention to the human – nature relationship. There were 15 interviewees who stated that in the holy books a lot of attention was paid to the topics that elaborated or spoke about the human – nature relationship, while the remaining seven interviewees stated that the holy books have paid enough attention to the themes related to the human – nature relationship.

“The Holy Book of Muslims mentions nature a lot ... It also emphasizes the human–nature relationship. Nature and its phenomena are mentioned in many quotations,” one of the interviewees said. Another interviewee explained that the holy books spoke a lot about the human–nature relationship, but they also noted that the human should live in harmony with nature and explained that the behavior should be seen in the context of threatening nature using the “care of a good host,” “A number of quotations from the Quran speak about nature in the context of natural phenomena in relation to God, as well as in relation to preserving the nature as God's creation,” stated the third interviewee.

The Bible speaks much about the human–nature relationship, and “at the very beginning ... in the book of Genesis, the creation of the world and its handing over to the human, who is the

master of all creation, is depicted (Genesis 1:26-27). ... nature and care for it are never underestimated or neglected throughout ... history ... God's presence in nature is not limited only to the period of creation, but to its natural and supernatural revelation, He affects it continuously through the history,” explained one theologian in his interview. The great attention paid to the human–nature relationship in “the Holy Scriptures testifies to the sacramental dimensions of the life and the world,” said another theologian. He explained that the human as 'microteos' and 'microcosmos' should protect nature, preserve it, and give it back as a gift to God. In another interview, one respondent explained that the Bible was a collection of God-inspired books written at different times and in different places by certain chosen persons and it contained many lessons for humans. "It is the source of the God-human-God relationship, but also of the human-nature relationship. Nature in all its entirety is given to the human to gain benefits from it, to respect and care for it, in order to finally thank God for the given, that is, bestowed,” explained the said respondent.

According to seven interviewees, there are enough topics in the holy books that speak about the human-nature relationship. But one of the interviewees noted that “the way of biblical thinking does not use today's common systematic processing and presentation of a particular topic. That is why this topic is present (sometimes explicitly, but much more implicitly) according to the then living conditions. It should not be forgotten that in the biblical period, humans felt as a real part of nature, recognized their dependence on their relationship towards it, and, on the other hand, they did not have the means possessed by today's mankind which obviously influences the disturbance of natural equilibrium.”

Another interviewee referring to the Quran stated: “... two aspects: first, nature and all that is in it is created because of the man, and secondly, man commits himself to preserve nature,

otherwise he will face great challenges.” His opinion that the Bible sufficiently speaks of the human-nature relationship is explained by the following words: "The Holy Fathers of the Church would say, ‘as much as the man needs for his salvation.’”

On the basis of the analyzed responses within the thematic framework related to the perception of the respondents regarding the representation of the themes about the human-nature relationship in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, it is notable that there is a greater representation of the answers that the holy books pay sufficient attention to the human-nature relationship.

2. **KEY QUOTATIONS IN THE HOLY BOOKS ON THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP**

“And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of its street; also, on either side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22: 1-2)

“And to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is Ever Encompassing all things” (An-Nisa 4:126)

The holy books contain a number of quotations that speak of the human and nature, or in certain quotations more precisely of the human-nature relationship. In interviews, the interviewed theologians pointed out more specific quotations in the holy books, which they

consider crucial. Some of the interviewees in their answer to this topic cited specific quotations from the holy books, without special explanations.

Regarding the Bible, the most frequently cited quotation (in 12 respondents) is the following: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

In eight interviews, the following quotation was cited: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it ...” (Genesis 2:15-16).

In four quotations, the following verse was cited: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (Genesis 2:7-8). An interviewed theologian also listed the book and the verses from the Bible that, in his opinion, were of extraordinary significance or which were extremely important for the human-nature relationship:

- I. Book *Song of Songs* (especially Chapter 4 - The Beauty of the Woman) and the instructional Old Testament books, especially the *Book of Wisdom of Sirach*.
- II. Matthew 6: 25-30: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in his entire splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?"

Another interviewee, in addition to the verses about the creation of the world, mentioned Psalm 103:27; Exodus 23:10-12, and Acts 17:28:

- I. “All expect of thee that thou give them food in season. What thou givest to them they shall gather up: when thou openest thy hand, they shall all be filled with good.” The entire psalm is inspired by God's concern for creation. Since man is created "in God's image and after His likeness," God should be an ideal for the human-nature relationship;
- II. “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.”
- III. “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” Creatures not only receive their existence from God, but retain the existence of remaining in God. Thus we are aware that the whole world lives in God, “For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things.” (Romans 11:36).

For the third interviewed theologian, the following verse of the Bible was crucial: "The heavens are the heaven of the Lord's: but the earth he has given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

One of the interviewed theologians indicated the following verses:

- I. “Expect the Lord and *keep* his way: and he will exalt thee *to inherit the land*” (Psalm 37:34);
- II. “... were blessed in their children, and their posterity will inherit the land” (Tobit 4:12);

III. “Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared” (Exodus 23:20).

Interviewed theologians when speaking of the human-nature relationship, according to the Quran, indicated more quotations found in the holy book. One of the interviewed theologians stated precisely that “nature in the Quran is mentioned as the creation of God. Natural phenomena are called *ayat* or in translation *signs*. The Sun and the Moon, gardens and flowers, rivers and seas are mentioned. These have a profound metaphysical dimension and the task of the human is to discover their inner dimension. They are especially emphasized as symbols of the beauty of God. There are hundreds of quotations in the Quran that speak about the natural phenomena.

In several interviews, the following quote was cited or indicated: “And it is He Who sends down water (rain) from the sky, and with it We bring forth vegetation of all kinds, and out of it We bring forth green stalks, from which We bring forth thick clustered grain. And out of the date-palm and its spathe come forth clusters of dates hanging low and near, and gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates, each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety and taste). Look at their fruits when they begin to bear, and the ripeness thereof. Verily! In these things there are signs for people who believe!” (Al-An’am 6: 99)

One of the interviewees points out the following verses as crucial: “See you not, that Allah sends down water (rain) from the sky, and causes it to penetrate the earth, (and then makes it to spring up) as water-springs and afterward thereby produces crops of different colours, and afterward they wither and you see them turn yellow, then He makes them dry and broken pieces. Verily, in this, is a Reminder for men of understanding.” (Az-Zumar39:21)

Another interviewed theologian explained instead of making specific quotations in the Quran related to the human-nature relationship, that the environment was created so that the human could use it for his or her own needs. He further explained that the human should behave responsibly towards the environment and should pay special attention to the continuation of the ecological balance¹⁹.

A third interviewee cited the following quotations from the Quran, which according to him were crucial to the human-nature relationship:

- I. Al-Fatihah 1: begins with gratitude to God who is the Master of the worlds. These worlds are also the herbaceous and flora which implies that gratitude to God in itself is attention to living nature.
- II. Al-A'raf 7:
 55. "Invoke your Lord with humility and in secret. He likes not the aggressors!"
 56. "And do not do mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, and invoke Him with fear and hope; Surely, Allah's Mercy is (ever) near unto the good doers"
 57. "And it is He Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His Mercy (rain). Till when they have carried a heavy-laden cloud, We drive it to a land that is dead, then We cause water (rain) to descend thereon. Then We produce every kind of fruit therewith. Similarly, We shall raise up the dead, so that you may remember or take heed!"
 58. "The vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the Permission of its Lord, and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but a little with difficulty. Thus, do We

¹⁹In the empirical material the following explanation of these verses was singled out: "The Quran stresses that everything has been created with a measure. This means that the use of natural resources should be moderate. The Quran teaches us that Allah has given the earth to the human in a legacy and the human must not create disorder and disrupt the balance (because it would result in a cataclysm)."

explain variously the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for a people who give thanks”

59. “Indeed, We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people and he said: "O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Ilah (God) but Him. (La ilaha ill-Allah: none has the right to be worshipped but Allah). Certainly, I fear for you the torment of a Great Day!"

III. El-En'am 6:38

“There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered.”

IV. Mulk 67:19

“Do they not see the birds above them, spreading out their wings and folding them in? None upholds them except the Most Beneficent (Allah). Verily, He is the All-Seer of everything.”

V. En-Nahl 16:

68. "And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: "Take you habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect."

69. "Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you). There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is healing for men. Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think.”

According to one of the interviewed theologians, a very important place in the Quran which can explain the human-nature relationship, is in the following verses:

Say: "Sufficient is Allah for a witness between me and you. He knows what is in the heavens and on earth." ... (Al-Ankebut 29: 52)

“The Path of Allah, to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth.

Verily, all the matters at the end go to Allah (for decision). (Ash Shura 42: 53)

The following verses are of significance in the Quran, singled out by one of the interviewees:

I. “He it is Who created for you all that is on earth. Then He Istawa (rose over) towards the heaven and made them seven heavens and He is the All-Knower of everything.”

(Al-Baqarah 2:29)

II. “Evil (sins and disobedience of Allah, etc.) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.), that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon).”

(Ar-Rum 30: 41)

III. “But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of legal enjoyment in this world, and do good as Allah has been good to you and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mufsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupts).”

(Al-Qasas 28:77)

IV. "And when it is said to them: ‘Make not mischief on the earth,’ they say: ‘We are only peacemakers.’ Verily! They are the ones who make mischief, but they perceive not."

(Al-Baqarah 2: 11-12).

V. “And do not do mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, and invoke Him with fear and hope; Surely, Allah's Mercy is (ever) near unto the good-doers.” (Al-A'raf 7: 56).

Another interviewed theologian emphasized the following verses from the Quran as being crucial to the human-nature relationship:

- I. “Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High; Who has created (everything), and then proportioned it; And Who has measured (preordainments for each and everything even to be blessed or wretched); then guided (i.e. showed mankind the right as well as wrong paths, and guided the animals to pasture)...” (Al- A'la 87: 1,2,3)
- II. "And do not do mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order." (Al-A'raf 7: 56)
- III. "Evil (sins and disobedience of Allah, etc.) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.)" (Ar-Room 30: 41)

Taking into account the aforementioned quotations and explanations from the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, we can conclude that there are many quotations found therein speaking about the human and nature or quotations which elaborate more precisely the human-nature relationship. The interviewees themselves cited a number of specific quotations found in the holy books which they considered to be crucial. Some quotations or quotations from the holy books were repeated by a number of interviewees. It is not claimed by the interviewees that all Biblical or Quranic passages were quoted or cited.

3. MORAL TEACHINGS

His morality was the Quran...²⁰

The Bible is a great moral lesson...²¹

The holy books contain elements of moral lessons that should guide the behavior of humans toward life in general, and accordingly, toward nature. But the majority of the

²⁰Interview no. 5, from this research.

²¹Interview no. 17, from this research.

interviewees pointed out that the relationship towards nature should be seen integrally, and it was contained or seen through all the behavior or attitude of the human as a believer. The theologian, age 53 was decisive during the interview: "One can not be a good believer and not to love and preserve the nature." The basic moral norms contained in the holy books also refer to the human-nature relationship and they are simply inseparable from the moral code of every believer. One interviewee believed that only in our imagination we can separate the human-nature relationship and speak specifically about it. Namely, he believes that one cannot say that a good believer acted badly with nature or he did to nature what he did not want to happen to him. "He is either a believer or not," concluded that respondent.

Two interviewees pointed out that during their worship services, in their religious collectivity, although not explicitly speaking about the human–nature relationship, "... the lessons about the behavior of believers also relate to the relationship toward nature and its resources." In another interview, the respondent stated that a fellow worshiper of his visited a "green" monastery and spoke with excitement about his experience. Then, the same respondent explained, the experience of their fellow "guided" them to show greater interest in natural issues and spontaneously began to speak with believers more about the importance of ecology and in general how they, as believers, should behave towards and with nature. In the next sentence, he emphasized that the religious community itself had to "bring those issues closer" to their believers much more in their practice. They may also establish their own ecological group...

The third interviewee put forward the following lessons from the Bible that, according to him, derived from it:

- I. Through creation (nature) we discover God's wisdom, strength and God's presence
- II. Back to Peace (paradise)

- III. Care for food (bodily and spiritual)
- IV. Thanksgiving - our participation in the Eucharist - the anticipation of the Kingdom of God
- V. Walking along the path of Salvation.

In his interview, one theologian elaborated that the “Biblical tradition did not separate justice and ecology, division and respect of the earth, the care of nature and the care for a quality human life.” The same respondent believed that “social and ecological issues are two aspects of the same urgency for the purpose of overcoming the disorder and put into balance the will for power, in order to rule justice, peace, and harmony.” Starting with the first verse from the Bible, where faith in one God, Creator of heaven and earth is confessed, the interviewee emphasized that “creation is not an issue of necessity: it is the result of the will of God, who created the world for love and freedom. The human being is part of that world and has the responsibility to give his or her own contribution to keep order and to correct disharmony with nature in the world.” This respondent also referred to the verses about creation and the lesson, writing: “among the various interpretations and seeking for the answer, how to understand the words that ‘God made humankind in His image’ (Genesis 1:27), many interpreters see it precisely in the way of *ruling* nature ... This means that man can accomplish the image of God in himself only if he treats what is created by God like God does: with love, righteousness, care, not with selfish cruelty.”

In his interview, the youngest theologian among the interviewees addressed the ecological crisis, which he considered to be a reflection of the spiritual crisis or “human fall and living in sin.” In that sense, he said that when “the human will become enlightened and return his ‘image’ that he has received from God, he does not need moral lessons to live a proper life and,

accordingly, a responsible relationship towards nature. The essential problem is not in the ecosystem, but in the human heart.”

Another interviewed theologian mentioned the lessons they heard in a recent worship service in a religious temple outside the country. He underlined the fact that it was emphasized believers should be true “*lovers*” of nature because that “*beauty*” was created by God. “... the human should preserve it and leave it to their posterity ... each of us should show greater care for nature and thus create a more beautiful and healthier place for our own life and the life of our fellow believers and future generations. These hurricanes, these floods ... among other things are the result of human unbelief, human spiritual emptiness and darkness ... Let's build nature and make the Garden of Eden around us,” wrote this respondent.

A third theologian said he has read about nature a long time ago on the Internet, and he himself encouraged and urged the youth to *ecological activism* ... He wrote that young people, like other believers, should create oases of nature, visit ecologically clean and untouched places in our surroundings and to testify there for the word of God. “Feel free to capture that beauty, write about it, publish those photos on social networks, but always insert Bible verses,” wrote the same theologian. He further elaborated his position writing longer than one page, explaining: “Imagine how good it would be for all of us to clean our street, square, hospital, workplace or promenade and plant a tree, flowers, grass, to produce food ... we will become more active, more humane, and we will turn to what God has given us ... to clean and to preserve nature together with our fellow people... as the Bible says ... to take care of our neighbor, but at this moment *nature is our neighbor* ... we need to interpret the verses from our holy book in this way and we should teach our neighbors what does nature mean and how to take care of it ... Let's do to nature what we want to be done to us. *Good returns with good* .”

“God is not pleased with talk only, and doing nothing. The Holy Books teach us to treat everything in a good manner,” explained the third theologian. “Let us clean our holy places, and all places within our sight ... but first let us clean our spirit ...,” wrote the same respondent. He also said that “we, the mundane teachers, should teach ordinary people of moral behavior towards everything, including the nature.”

The fourth theologian said that every part of the holy books have a lesson on how we should treat nature, people, and everything that surrounds us. But he wrote we should refer more to the sacred words and read and learn them, and repeatedly re-examine our behavior towards nature. Then he said we should do something good for the nature around us, so he asked himself: “Why cannot nature be our holy temple? Is not it good to hold our services at least a few times a year in nature? ... instructive words about nature in nature? That way we will more quickly raise the awareness of all around us about nature,” explained the same respondent.

The words of the "green" Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew were part of the answer to that question by another theologian: “We are able to embrace all – not with fear or necessity, but with love and joy. Then, we care for the plants and for the animals, for the trees and for the rivers, for the mountains and for the seas, for all human beings and for the whole natural environment”²².

The following moral lessons originate from the Holy Word, cited by another respondent:

I. Caring for the world as our common home.

²² The same respondent also explained the following: "Then, we discover joy – rather than inflicting sorrow – in our life and in our world. Then, we are creating instruments of life and not tools of death. Then, creation on the one hand and humanity on the other hand, the one that encompasses and the one that is encompassed, cooperate and correspond. Then, they are no longer in contradiction or in conflict. Then, just as humanity offers creation in an act of priestly service and sacrifice to God, so also does creation offer itself in return as a gift to humanity. Then, everything becomes an exchange, an abundance, and a fulfillment of love“, Address by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Oslo Sophie Prize Ceremony June 12, 2002, <http://www.sofieprisen.no/Articles/48.html>, accessed on 09.03.2019.

- II. Care for nature is a responsibility of every Christian along with the care for our neighbors, and especially for the poor.
- III. Christians are obliged to express deep respect and care for every human person, as well as for all living beings on the land where we are building our home.
- IV. Every creation on earth has its own purpose and everything that makes up the Universe tells us about Divine Love.
- V. We must be aware that we need each other and that we have a shared responsibility for the others and the world (for every creation of God), to be in solidarity and to work for the good of the whole world.

There are many places in the Quran that speak about nature, about the human–nature relationship. One theologian pointed out that “nature is created for man and he should protect it if he wants to protect himself.” Further, he said that “nature is God’s mirror,” and in that sense he explained that the human–nature relationship was also important for the very relationship of the human towards God. The same respondent emphasized the Quranic stance, which clearly states that there should be no disorder in the world, in which the order was established by the Most High God.

Two theologians in their responses pointed out that according to the Quran there would be two heavens for the God-fearing believers. The *real heaven* is described as a place with green nature and clear water in the rivers ... The third theologian wrote that we should make our environment like the picturesque gardens of Eden.

“Nature is given to the human as a legacy,” observed another interviewee, pointing to the responsibility the human has toward nature. The same respondent further stated that according to the Quran everything has been created with a balance. He pointed to an important lesson that

“this balance must not be disturbed,” because “the equilibrium with which it is created must not be disturbed. The Quran literally says that “everything is created with a measure.” At the same time, he referred to the lesson or to the message of the holy book that “everything should be used for what it was created.”

Two other theologians stated in their answers that nature was given to the human as a legacy and that humans needed to take care of it because they should leave it to their descendants. One of them explained that if he did not protect it, he would have nothing to leave to his children and grandchildren. “We should teach believers to think where and how their descendants will live, if we do not care about nature. Is it written in our holy book that we do not have to take care of the nature around us?” the interviewed theologian concluded with that question.

One younger theologian separated the following moral lessons from the Quran:

- I. "And do not [do] mischief on the earth after it has been set in order..." (Al-A'raf 7:85)
- II. "And do good as Allah has been good to you and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mufsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupted ones)" (Al-Qases 28:77).²³
- III. “And those who break the Covenant of Allah, after its ratification, and sever that which Allah has commanded to be joined (i.e. they sever the bond of kinship and are not good to their relatives), and work mischief in the land, on them is the curse (i.e. they will be far away from Allah's Mercy); And for them is the unhappy (evil) home (i.e. Hell)!”
(Er-R'ad 13:25)

²³ The interviewee further elaborated those verses, stating that when we analyzed them we found without any doubt, a strong connection between the human's belief (the Iman) and deciding to stop to destroy nature.

IV. Nature is a test site for man, he is instructed to read her signs in order to understand God. For this reason, as well as to fulfill their mission as God's regent, the Muslims developed the natural sciences "Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water (rain) which Allah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving (living) creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed Ayat (proofs, evidences, signs, etc.) for people of understanding." (Al-Baqarah 2: 164)

V. "And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, for mere play; We created them not except with truth (i.e. to examine and test those who are obedient and those who are disobedient and then reward the obedient ones and punish the disobedient ones), but most of them know not." (Ed-duhán 44: 38-39)

VI. Humanity is inspired to study and understand nature in the function of its goals. According to the Quran, we must study nature, use its benefits, build it, and not destroy it.

Another interviewed theologian said that if we "make a summary of all ayats - verses that describe parts of the Universe and the Earth, we would get a beautiful picture of nature. They describe the sun, moon, plants, crops, fruits, gardens, clouds, rain, springs, flows of rivers and seas. It also follows ... shifting of the day and night, darkness and light, cold and heat, hills, mountains and fields, animals and humans. The description of the cosmos (the universe) in the Quran is made in its basic capacity, and it is one change in continuity and one perpetual movement."

On the basis of the answers processed and presented, it can be noted that a large number of interviewees, with different vocabulary, but referring to the same or similar meaning, emphasize that the holy books contain many verses from which the foundations for moral lessons originate.

4. ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Regarding this research question, we asked interviewees to express their perception or attitude about the ecological awareness of believers in general or, more broadly, of the Macedonian population.

The answers were different, but there was one group that pointed out that the ecological awareness of the believers in the Macedonian society was relatively underdeveloped or undeveloped. The answers ranged from the level that there was no environmental awareness among the population to being medium-developed. Only three interviewees indicated that the ecological awareness among the Macedonian population was medium-developed. Sixteen interviewees stated that the ecological awareness among the Macedonian population was either undeveloped, or developed at a relatively low level, or almost nonexistent. Two interviewees did not give a specific answer, and only one of them did not answer this question at all.

“Ecological awareness is underdeveloped especially in the younger population,” wrote one of the interviewees. “We can not talk about ecological awareness at all. And especially not in Macedonia. This is best reflected by the dirty cities in which greenery is neglected, or greenery is not replenished. Our capital is one of the most polluted in the Balkans,” explained another interviewee. In this context, an additional three interviewees gave their answers, who also stated that during the winter periods Macedonian cities were among the most polluted in the world.

“Ecological awareness is undeveloped ... it's obvious ... there are landfills everywhere,” noted another interviewee. One of the interviewees explained that environmental awareness or ethics, “as it is commonly said, is being developed more as a result of the destruction and devastation/exhaustion of natural resources..., but in reality there is a lot of talk about ecological ethics and ecological awareness, and nature is being destroyed at a much greater velocity.” That interviewee has illustrated his answer with three photographs, which are presented in the annex to this report.

“The ecological awareness of the Macedonian citizens is undeveloped, and the institutions, both central and local, are to blame for this,” considered one of the interviewed theologians. He also thought religious communities paid little attention to ecological awareness, and that the ecological awareness among the Macedonian population is undeveloped, but he wondered “whether it is the fault of the believers or their predecessors.”

Two interviewed theologians stated that ecological awareness was medium-developed but did not elaborate their answer. Only one of the interviewed said that ecological awareness was moderately developed, which was reflected in the condition of the monasteries, but also in other institutions. He further stated there were many environmental organizations, but he was very pleased that they work with the youngest; “the development of environmental awareness is a long-term process that requires a lot of time, religious organizations must engage much more,” concluded the same respondent.

Based on the answers processed, we can generally draw a conclusion with regard to this research question that more than two thirds of the interviewed population believed that the ecological awareness of believers in the Macedonian society was undeveloped or relatively underdeveloped.

5. THE ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS OF THE BELIEVERS OF MY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Regarding this topic, in addition to asking the interviewees to present their perception of the ecological awareness of the believers from the religious community they belong to, we asked them to indicate how much they believed that their believers knew the moral lessons about the human-nature relationship and how much those norms influenced their behavior. In the introductory analysis, it was noticeable that those answers were predominantly pointed to the "negative sides" rather than the positive movements in this field.

From the analysis of those responses it followed that 14 interviewees reported that in their religious collectivity the ecological awareness of their believers was undeveloped or slightly developed.

An interviewed theologian wrote: "Although in the last two decades the environmental problem is one of the main themes in modern theology, I think there is little development of the ecological awareness among believers." Another interviewed theologian argued that the ecological awareness of the believers from his religious community was slightly developed, but it was due to the fact "that the religious consciousness of the believers is weak and incompletely developed." The third interviewed theologian said that, in his opinion, in his religious collectivity "the members are not familiar with ecology as a special discipline at all ... it is a neglected discipline to which the religious education programs do not pay any attention." The fourth theologian stated that "Because of the other events that have been happening lately in Islamic countries, issues related to the environmental protection are put aside."

Five interviewees said the ecological awareness of the believers of their religious collectivity is moderately developed. "I would say that it is *moderately developed*, but it has the

potential, with the work of the clergy and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, to develop further,” said one theologian. Another theologian argued that the ecological awareness of the faithful was medium-developed in the following way: “For many reasons, perhaps because the theological focus in the past century, both in the East and the West, was directed towards the historical dimension, and not to the ecological valuation of nature.” Two theologians gave a similar answer, saying that ecological awareness was medium-developed because we had more aware citizens, but there was a lack of a deeper, or as one of them said, systematic work with believers about environmental issues.”

“The ecological awareness among the believers of my religious collectivity is medium-developed because some of our believers felt the consequences of the ecological crisis on their own and therefore I think that some of our believers are becoming very aware of the environmental problems,”²⁴ explained one of the interviewed theologians.

One of the interviewees considered that the ecological awareness of believers from his religious collectivity was highly developed and that “it is particularly evident in monastic fraternities and sisterhoods. Part of their everyday tasks is to take care of nature as God's creation.”

Two believers did not give a specific answer to this question. One interviewee gave a hypothetical answer stating, “anyone who has at least little respect for God and Divine will then have respect for nature and everything around him”

The undeveloped or slightly developed ecological awareness, as the interviewees predominantly answered, is primarily due to ignorance or poor knowledge of the moral lessons taught by the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, about the human–nature relationship. In this

²⁴In the interview, the interviewee did not indicated the kind of negative experience of believers from his religious collectivity.

context, even the modest knowledge of moral norms and lessons about the human–nature relationship cannot or will only slightly affect their behavior.

From the analysis of the question of how many believers knew the moral lessons that the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, teach us about the human–nature relationship, it turned out that most of the interviewees (12) stated they either did not know them at all or knew very little. However, as the two interviewed wrote, there were many lessons in the holy books on how man should behave towards nature. “Unfortunately, I must admit that when I got the interview and while I was preparing to answer it, I asked the believers about this topic, but some shrugged their shoulders ... some were surprised. Again, unfortunately, I must say that believers know very little about these norms and maybe that's why we are getting deeper and deeper into an ecological crisis,” the interviewee presented his conclusion in his interview.²⁵

Another interviewee stated in his answer that today in Macedonia there were monasteries, monks, priests, believers and he was personally convinced that among them there were many who had good knowledge of ecology. Some of them practiced it, but unfortunately “the majority of the believers, in my opinion, have very little knowledge about these topics. But the task for us theologians is to change the situation as soon as possible,” concluded the interviewed theologian.

“The believers from my religious collectivity have very poor knowledge about the moral lessons contained in the Quran regarding nature because of the low awareness of this relationship,” commented a third interviewed theologian.

The interviewed theologian, age 37, accurately answered the question: “Believers partially know the moral lessons ... they often have the opportunity to hear about the moral values that the

²⁵An interviewee gave an interesting example: “I know the manufacturer of agricultural products, who regularly labeled his products sold on the local market as eco-friendly and, free of pesticides ... but since we live in a small town, we know how he produces these products, where he buys pesticides, ”etc. At the same time, the interviewee also stated that he was a great believer who gave important contributions to the religious collectivity.

Quran teaches about the human–nature relationship in various lectures. And students of the 6th grade learn about moral values in the course *'Ethics of Religions.'*”

Another interviewed theologian in this context explained the reason for the poor knowledge among believers of the moral lessons found in the Quran about the human–nature relationship and said: “The correct relationship of the believer towards nature is a concept that has been incorporated into the tradition of Muslims in our regions and it was more taken care of in the past, but nowadays due to the modernization there is a trend of leaving the traditional state of mind, and on the other hand an unsystematic approach to modernity ... briefly speaking, believers do not feel the authority of faith on one hand, and on the other hand they can not keep up with modernity, so the relationship towards nature is in a disasterous situation.”

Five of the interviewees did not provide a specific or precise answer, so some of their answers are presented here. The youngest of all interviewed theologians did not directly answer the question, but he stated that ecology was not promoted enough in Macedonia, even in the church. He also added that it was up to us, taking as an example the engagement of His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the greatest advocate of ecology in the Christian world, to put more efforts into the fight for the environment, giving an example to our believers.

Another interviewed theologian stated: “Those who read the Bible and attend the religious services, hear the gospel and preaching--have heard. But not everyone hears ... (“Whoever has ears to hear let him hear (Luke 8: 5-15).” Similar is the answer of the next interviewee: “the major moral lesson is that God is the Creator of the world, that is, the Creator of the human and nature, therefore, care for nature is part of the necessary worship of God.”

Only four interviewees stated that believers from their religious collectivity “know very well” the moral lessons on which the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, teach us about the

human–nature relationship. Three interviewees made a gradation of believers, pointing to the existence of nominal believers, but also real believers who “regularly attend church services and who are very familiar with this issue.” One interviewee stated that in religious collectivities, today in Macedonia there were mostly traditional believers, (which should not even be called believers, I suggest occasional visitors²⁶) who were not acquainted with their faith. Then he said true believers knew very well the moral lessons that referred to the human–nature relationship.

According to the presented answers of the interviewed theologians, it can be noted that the ecological awareness of the believers in their religious collectivity is undeveloped or slightly developed. A large number of the interviewees also stated they had relatively small knowledge regarding the moral lessons related to the human–nature relationship contained in the holy books.

6. THE ROLE OF THE LEADERSHIP OF THE RELIGIOUS COLLECTIVITY REGARDING THE ISSUES OF THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP

Having in mind the responses of interviewees in the previous thematic block that point to the relatively underdeveloped environmental awareness and lack of knowledge of the moral lessons found in the holy books about the human–nature relationship, it is interesting to analyze or see the perception of the interviewees about the role of leadership in the religious collectivity in terms of raising ecological awareness among the members of various religious collectivities.

Most of the interviewees, 17 out of the total 22 interviewed theologians, underlined the extremely important or great role of religious leadership and considered it crucial for addressing these issues and the "turning green" of their religious collectivity in general. “In ecological activism, there are almost no representatives of religious leaderships ... they stay aside ... however, they do not have to be active, but they should clearly state their point of view,” noted

²⁶ This part of the answer is with bolded letters.

the same respondent. Another interviewed theologian also defined the role of religious leaders as being “overwhelming and always persistent.”

Based on his previous experience, another interviewee said there were no “visible and tangible results, but there is always justification for this, such as to actualize the problem itself, to make efforts to solve it, to practice and observe it.”

A third interviewed wrote that “the role of religious leadership is primary, and being such it dictates the attitude of the lower clergy and the faithful people towards the various topics at the state level ... thus, each individual initiative can only represent a good will and will be limited to very small area“.

“The role is potentially huge, but in reality extremely small, because, I remind you that we have a huge number of nominal, and a small number of real believers,” explained another theologian. Two other theologians said that “the contribution of religious leaders and their consultants is priceless or enormous, but in reality, the dominance of various other issues somehow defocuses them from these topics, and they do not reach the agenda; thus, one gets the impression that those topics are either forgotten or unimportant.”

“I think that the role of religious communities and their leadership is great if they intensely and correctly include these issues in their agenda,” concluded another theologian. A critical attitude towards religious leadership was also expressed by the interviewed theologian who said that our religious leadership did not show any awareness of the environmental challenges facing modern people. He further wrote that “this topic was almost never mentioned at religious services, which of course could not result in raising the ecological awareness and knowledge of believers.” Such a critical stance towards religious leadership was also expressed by the next interviewee, who emphasized that even among them, ecological awareness was not at

the level required by the religious provisions. The similar opinion of the leadership also prevailed in the response of another interviewed theologian who precisely explained: "I think that the role of leadership is crucial when it comes to raising ecological awareness among believers, but, unfortunately, they are not aware enough of their role in society, regarding the issue of raising environmental awareness."

The next interviewed theologian also spoke about the role of religious leadership, but from a slightly different angle. He considered that in the last twenty years, the environmental issue has often been a subject presented at forums around the world, so it was probably a reason to be re-actualized by giving it adequate space and place in the messages, speeches, and in the official positions of religious leaders. He concluded by giving an example of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who, due to his numerous activities in that field, was also called the "green" patriarch.

The other respondents either did not give a precise answer to this question, did not answer this question, or as two of them considered, the role of religious leadership in this context was not so significant. Much more important for them is the role of priests who are constantly in contact with their believers. "Leadership can address this problem in front of the religious community, but only those who are directly related to the believers can solve it," one of the interviewees concludes.

Based on the analysis of the empirical material in relation to this topic, it can be concluded that according to the majority of the interviewed theologians, the role of the religious leadership is very important or great for raising the ecological awareness of the believers within their own religious collectivity.

7. ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

Having in mind the responses of interviewees in the previous thematic block that point to the relatively underdeveloped environmental awareness and the small knowledge of the moral lessons of the holy books about the human–nature relationship, it is interesting to analyze or see the perception of the interviewees about the role of religion in terms of raising ecological awareness among the members of the various religious communities or the population in general.

Over half of the interviewed (twelve out of twenty-two) reported that this role is major or important. Thus, one of the interviewed theologians said it was "high, but the results depend not only on the charisma of the clergy, but also on the consumers."

Another interviewee said that the role of religion is very important. He continued to elaborate his position by pointing out that "Islam is a comprehensive way of living and it is not limited only to the spiritual aspect of human life, but rather, its primary concern is the application of its rules in the everyday life of man, that is, in all aspects of life." "Religious communities play an enormous role in the creation of potentials for developing environmental ethics, but I have an impression," one of the interviewees said, adding that they were not sufficiently convinced of the importance and urgency of their work on the issues of ecology. The other respondent complemented this attitude, arguing that the moment they would become aware of that, they would put much more effort in developing the ecological awareness of believers.

Two theologians wrote that the role of religion or religious communities in Macedonian society was much greater than they could imagine. One of them said that the role of religion in the previous social and political system was to blame, and the other, that it was due to internal divisions and disagreements.

Three theologians also affirmed the great role that religion played in shaping ecological morality, and they explained their position in a similar way. "All the representatives of religious communities and believers need to be involved more actively ... it is necessary to work much more at the level of small communities, and then with other believers more action and involvement or cooperation with environmental organizations is needed... ," the interviewed theologians said. The latest interviewed theologian also wrote that both parties would benefit from working together with environmental organizations, they would come closer to religious truths, and believers would come closer to ecological activities.

Four of the interviewees believed that the role was relatively smaller and not so important. One of the interviewed theologians said that "we can not speak about the role of religion as itself, but I believe that, at this moment, religious communities, with the exception of a few, have no influence on the development of ecological awareness. I hope this will change in the near future, because the potential exists and if the clergy wants, the Church can lead the initiative and the activities in this field." The role of religion or religious communities in our society is too small or minor to influence the creation of environmental ethics, said five of the interviewees. Two of them held it was due to the fact that in Macedonian society the number of nominal believers was extremely large. Two interviewed theologians did not elaborate their positions.

Three interviewees held that we could not talk about the role of religion at all as one of the sources or the base of its ecological awareness. "The talk is broadly about cleanliness of the homes, but not about the cleanliness of the environment," noted one of them. "Religion does not have its place in Macedonian society unless it comes closer to the political parties that use it for their goals, so we cannot speak about ecology at all," said decisively another interviewed

theologian. The third interviewee when asked about the relation between religion and ecology, answered that, today in Macedonia, religious communities had almost no role or influence.

Two interviewees did not give an adequate answer to this question.

Based on the analyzed responses of the interviewed theologians included in the research sample, it can be concluded that the role of religion in Macedonian society is basically very important in terms of creation and development of the ecological ethics.

V. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

The question of the human–nature relationship is becoming increasingly important. With all its seriousness, the ecological crisis is a warning that the behavior of the modern human towards the environment leads to very serious consequences. The increasingly polluted nature and the disrupted ecological balance seriously warn of shocking consequences in the nearer and more distant future. Because the human being with his/her behavior is pointed out as the main culprit, but also as being crucial in resolving the ecological crisis, there is a need to take strategic steps in the direction of developing ecological awareness and conscience.

It is an undoubted fact that religions, that is, the holy books on which they are grounded, contain many topics that form the basis of many moral lessons about the human–nature relationship regardless of whether it is a matter of genesis, current life, or the future.

The public role of religion addresses the issue of its engagement in the sphere of morality. The public discourse often discusses the connection between religion and morality, which suggests that religion should be the "source" of moral behavior and should help overcome the present crisis of values. The modern concept of public religion suggests that religion should give its own contribution or support to individual and public morality in society.

The subject matter of this project is the separation and actualization of the thematic areas of the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, in which the human-nature relationship is elaborated, indicated, or specified. The emphasis is put on the moral lessons contained in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, referring to the human–nature relationship. In that context, their influence on the development of ecological awareness, which, among other things, will be supported by or grounded in the holy books. The next stages of work on this topic or in the follow-up of this project idea, would be aimed at the gradual concrete implementation of environmental topics in the various activities of religious collectivities, such as regular religious services, work with respective groups, speaking about the topics in public, and showing good environmental practices by one’s own example. . At the same time, gradual insertion of these topics into curricula and content in educational institutions would be suggested.

Within this project, according to the analysis of the empirical material, appropriate concluding observations have been made, which are presented according to the agreed-upon research questions.

On the basis of the analyzed responses of the respondents' perceptions regarding the representation of the topics of the relationship between the human and nature in the holy books, the Bible and the Quran, it is noticeable that there is a greater representation of the answers that the holy books pay sufficient attention to the human–nature relationship.

The holy books contain a number of quotations which speak of the human and nature, or in certain quotations, more precisely of the human–nature relationship. In the interviews, the interviewed theologians pointed out many specific quotations in the holy books, which are crucial to the human-nature relationship.

The holy books contain the fundamentals of moral lessons that should guide the behavior of human beings towards life in general, and accordingly, towards nature. The basic moral norms contained in the holy books also refer to the human-nature relationship, and they are simply inseparable from the moral code of every believer. Based on the processed and presented answers, it can be noted that a larger number of the interviewed, using different vocabulary but referring to the same or similar point, emphasized that in the holy books there were many verses from which the foundations for moral lessons originated.

Based on the answers processed, a general conclusion can be drawn regarding this research question that more than two thirds of the surveyed population hold that the ecological awareness of believers in Macedonian society is undeveloped or relatively underdeveloped.

According to the presented answers of the interviewed theologians, it can be seen that the ecological awareness of believers in their religious collectivity is undeveloped or slightly developed, and the larger number of interviewees stated that they had relatively low knowledge about the moral lessons referring to the human–nature relationship contained in the holy books.

Based on the analysis of the empirical material, it can be concluded that according to the majority of the interviewed theologians, the role of religious leadership is very important or great in the direction of raising the ecological awareness of believers within their own religious collectivity.

From the analysis of the empirical evidence it can be concluded that the role of religion in Macedonian society is fundamentally significant in the direction of proper creation and development of ecological ethics.

In general, the results of this research project point to the conclusion that religion is an important source or basis of morality, and it determines the attitude of the human being to

nature. In that sense, religious collectivities/communities can and should be much more involved in the actualization of the issues related to environmental protection.

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VII. ATTACHMENTS

1. QUOTATIONS IN THE BIBLE ON THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 1:26-28

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth...’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Genesis 2:15

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”

Genesis 33:13

“Jacob said, ‘My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die.’”

Deuteronomy 20:19-20

"When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you? Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down, that you may construct siegeworks against the city that is making war with you until it falls.”

Deuteronomy 22:6-7

"If you happen to come upon a bird's nest along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall certainly let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, in order that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.”

Psalms 115:16

“The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth He has given to the sons of men.”

Proverbs 12:10

“A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel.”

Revelation 22:1-2

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

2. QUOTATIONS IN THE QURAN ON THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP

Qaf 50:6 “Have they not looked at the heaven above them, how We have made it and adorned it, and there are no rifts in it?”

Al-Ghashiyah 88:17-20 “Do they not look at the camels, how they are created? And at the heaven, how it is raised? And at the mountains, how they are rooted and fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out?”

Al-A'raf 7:

55. “Invoke your Lord with humility and in secret. He likes not the aggressors.”

56. “And do not do mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, and invoke Him with fear and hope; Surely, Allah's Mercy is (ever) near unto the good doers.”

57. “And it is He Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His Mercy (rain). Till when they have carried a heavy laden cloud, We drive it to a land that is dead, then We cause water (rain) to descend thereon. Then We produce every kind of fruit therewith. Similarly, We shall raise up the dead, so that you may remember or take heed.”

58. “The vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the Permission of its Lord, and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but a little with difficulty. Thus do We explain variously the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for a people who give thanks.”

59. “Indeed, We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people and he said: "O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Ilah (God) but Him. (La ilaha ill-Allah: none has the right to be worshipped but Allah). Certainly, I fear for you the torment of a Great Day!"

Al-An'am 6:38. “There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered.”

Al-Mulk 67:19 “Do they not see the birds above them, spreading out their wings and folding them in? None upholds them except the Most Beneficent (Allah). Verily, He is the All-Seer of everything.”

An-Nahl 16:

68. “And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: ‘Take you habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect.

69. “Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you).’ There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is healing for men. Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think.”

Ash-Shu'ara 26:7 “Do they not observe the earth, how much of every good kind We cause to grow therein?”

An-Nisa' 4:126 “And to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is Ever Encompassing all things!”

Al-Waqi'ah 56:

68. “Tell Me! The water that you drink ?”

69. “Is it you who cause it from the rainclouds to come down, or are We the Causer of it to come down?”

70. “If We willed, We verily could make it salt (and undrinkable), why then do you not give thanks (to Allah)?”

Ghafir 40:57 “The creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than the creation of mankind, yet most of mankind know not!”

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