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Ecology of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis

The discussion of ecology is often considered a topic of a narrow circle of experts and environmental enthusiasts. Encyclical *Laudato si'* by Pope Francis raises a wide range of issues related to the ecological crisis in our world and highlights the urgency of this problem not only in social debates but also in relation to the teachings of the Catholic Church. A Theology of Ecology seeks to answer the question of what it means to “behave ecologically.” This area did not go unnoticed by the predecessors of Pope Francis. In our study, we pay attention to the ecology of three popes — John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and the current Pope Francis. Sadly, the wide range of ecologically themes and issues cannot be exhaustively covered in the limited scope of this study.

The ecology of Pope John Paul II

At the end of the twentieth century, in the period of so-called deep ecology, when ecology began to converge with philosophy and faith, Pope John Paul II was quoted frequently. The Pope speaks for the first time directly about ecology and tries to bring it into dialogue

with theology. In his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, he writes: “Today in an ever increasingly acute way, the so-called »ecological« question poses itself in relation to socio-economic life and work. Certainly, humanity has received from God himself the task of ‘dominating’ the created world and ‘cultivating the garden’ of the world. But this is a task that humanity must carry out in respect for the divine image received, and, therefore, with intelligence and with love, assuming responsibility for the gifts that God has bestowed and continues to bestow. Humanity has in its possession a gift that must be passed on to future generations, if possible, passed on in better condition. Even these future generations are the recipients of the Lord’s gifts.”¹ He also reminds that “we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity. A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the things of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization — three considerations which alert our consciences to the »moral dimension« of development.”² John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the encyclical *Populorum progressio*: “The moral character of development exclude respect for the beings which constitute the natural world, which the ancient Greeks — alluding precisely to the order which distinguishes it — called the »cosmos«.”³ The theme of ecology is also present in other documents of John Paul II.⁴ In the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, he reminds the need for careful planning in terms of wealth utilization so as to avoid endangering the environment. “Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator’s will that man should communicate with

1 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 43.

2 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 43.

3 John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 34.

4 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, no. 15–16, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, no. 1, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 34, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 37–40, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, no. 42.

nature as an intelligent and noble »master« and »guardian«, and not as a heedless »exploiter« and »destroyer«.⁵ There is a great danger of a consumerist way of life and other problematic issues arising from the accumulation of wealth by those who have enough material resources. But at the same time, there is a huge amount of those who do not have the necessary material and financial resources at all. Within the framework of human ecology, John Paul II develops both the issue of abundance and deprivation. “Hand in hand go a certain abuse of freedom by one group—an abuse linked precisely with a consumer attitude uncontrolled by ethics—and a limitation by it of the freedom of the others, that is to say, those suffering marked shortages and being driven to conditions of even worse misery and destitution.”⁶ John Paul II’s predecessors pointed on this contradiction: “Most recently by John XXIII and by Paul VI,⁷ represent the gigantic development of the parable in the Bible of the rich banqueter and the poor man Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19–31). So widespread is the phenomenon that it brings into question the financial, monetary, production and commercial mechanisms that, resting on various political pressures, support the world economy. These are proving incapable either of remedying the unjust social situations inherited from the past, or of dealing with the urgent challenges and ethical demands of the present. By submitting man to tensions created by himself, dilapidating at an accelerated pace material and energy resources, and compromising the geophysical environment, these structures unceasingly make the areas of misery spread, accompanied by anguish, frustration and bitterness.”⁸

The issues linked to ecology are traced in Bull of John Paul II *Inter sanctos*, by which he proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi as the patron of

5 John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, no. 15.

6 John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, no. 16.

7 John xxIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, no. 200, 224; Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, no. 45.

8 John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, no. 16.

ecologists. “He belongs to saint and famous people who gave honour to nature as a unique gift of Lord to people.”⁹

The ecological issue has its origins in the concern that human actions are often directed against nature and man, and points to the fact that the whole world is to be in service to man, as the Book of Genesis puts it clearly: ‘subdue the earth’ (Gen. 1:28). In his exhortation *Christifideles laici*, Pope John Paul II explains that “the dominion granted to humanity by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to ‘use and misuse’, or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to ‘eat of the fruit of the tree’ (cf. Gen 2:16–17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity.”¹⁰ Human activity is linked to nature. The encyclical *Laborem exercens* states: “Work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes »more a human being«.”¹¹

The presence of man in creation points to his responsibility for it and for the world, which by its goodness is to be at his service, in accordance with the Creator’s intention. It is not only the individual who is involved, but the responsibility interpreted in relation to nature extends to all contemporaries in their relationship to the future generations. Responsibility for ecology also derives from the knowledge and awareness of the limited availability of natural resources as John Paul II stated in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*: “Among today’s positive signs we must also mention

9 Cf. John Paul II, List ogłoszający św. Franciszka z Asyżu patronem ekologów *Inter sanctos*, [in:] *Listy Pastorskie Ojca świętego Jana Pawła II*, red. A. Sporniak, Kraków 1997, pp. 604–605.

10 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 43.

11 John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, no. 9.

a greater realization of the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them to certain demagogic ideas about the latter. Today this is called ecological concern.”¹² The encyclical refers to a threefold aspect that is important to reflect on.

The first consideration states that “one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animals, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely »the cosmos«.”

The second consideration is based on the realization that “natural resources are limited; some are not renewable. Using them as if they were inexhaustible seriously endangers their availability.” Using resources is for present generation, but we must also remember those who will come after us.

The third consideration relates to consequences for quality of life. John Paul II recalls: “We all know that the direct or indirect result of industrialization is the pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of the population. It is evident that development, the planning which governs it, and the way in which resources are used must include respect for moral demands.”¹³

When the Pope teaches about ecology, he emphasizes that the absence of life respect and human dignity is a behavior that is fundamentally inconsistent with the rules of nature. At this point the question resonates: How is it possible to take an effective stance on the nature protection when it justifies actions that directly strike at the very heart of creation, which is human existence? The issue of the ecological crisis is not only about the negative attitude towards the environment, but also about showing the way to save it.

¹² John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 26.

¹³ John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 34.

When the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991) was announced on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* it aroused a great attention. It deals with the world and man from many perspectives. The field of ecology is only a small part, but it has a great impact.¹⁴ The encyclical focuses on ecology in no. 37: “Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life. [...] Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.”¹⁵ The issue of ecology has its own specificities, which need to be interpreted in the proper way in the context of a balanced approach to the whole perspective of environmental protection. The Pope says: “In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the *human environment*, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. Although people are rightly worried – though much less than they should be – about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to *safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic »human ecology«*.”¹⁶

In the encyclical, there is also some space for families – for the theme of “interpersonal ecology” or the ecology of the family. “The first and fundamental structure for »human ecology« is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and

¹⁴ Cf. O. Klein, V. Bencko, *Ekologie člověka a zdraví*, Praha 1996, p. 155.

¹⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 37. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 34; Message for the World Day of Peace 1990: AAS, LXXXII (1990), pp. 147–156.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 38.

goodness and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it means to be a person.”¹⁷ It consequently follows that “it is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the *sanctuary of life*. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth.”¹⁸ A family is the center of the culture of life. That is why the Holy Father proposes a new ecological conception that presents man in his natural environment, in which society and the person himself are involved, pointing to the integral development of the human personality.¹⁹

In his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* — on the value and inviolability of human life — John Paul II refers to the ecological issue in no. 42 where the idea of man’s responsibility for life echoes. “As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question-ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to »human ecology«.”²⁰

Ecological themes are an important issue for Pope John Paul II. During his pontificate, he paid great attention not only to the protection of nature itself, but also to anthropology, which relates to human existence. The ecological notion is a complex problem: it is not enough to look for the causes of the destruction of the world in over-industrialization or in the pursuit of wealth, without being aware of the future consequences. The cause of these attitudes is deeper. It lies in the moral attitude of man himself. What threatens

17 John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 39.

18 John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 39.

19 Cf. M. Wyrostkiewicz, *Spór o człowieka w ekologii*, Lublin 2004, pp. 217–222.

20 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 38.

creation and human beings the most is the loss of respect for the laws of nature and the weakening of respect for human life.²¹

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, he similarly responded to the ecological issue: “And how can we remain indifferent to the prospect of an *ecological crisis* which is making vast areas of our planet uninhabitable and hostile to humanity?”²²

Pope John Paul II sees the issue of ecological danger in the context of the upcoming ecological catastrophe, which is related to a change in the moral and ethical attitudes of man.

The ecology of Pope Benedict XVI

The ecology issue has also its place in the initiatives of Pope Benedict XVI who followed the footsteps of his predecessors, especially John Paul II. His voice was heard on many occasions in favour of addressing ecological problems. He was committed to the protection of the environment as the space where the community of mankind lives. Therefore, he links the protection of the environment to the protection of life. Pope Benedict XVI often refers to the encyclical *Populorum progressio*²³ by Paul VI and to the Message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 1990) by John Paul II.

In his Message for World Day of Peace 2007 in the chapter on the Ecology of Peace, he quotes John Paul II and his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”²⁴ Man is to behave in such a way as to fulfill the role God entrusts to him. In addition to the notion of natural ecology, Benedict XVI formulates other notions that derive from natural ecology.

21 Cf. M. Wyrostkiewicz, *Spór o człowieka w ekologii*, Lublin 2004, pp. 237.

22 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 51.

23 Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 8.

24 John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, no. 38.

It is a “human ecology” which in turn requires a “social ecology”. “Experience shows that *disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence*, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men. Both presuppose peace with God.”²⁵ The Pope also refers to “human ecology” in his Message for the World Day of Peace 2009, when he addresses the theme of peace in the context of the fight against poverty. In this message we can read that “it remains true that every form of externally imposed poverty has at its root a lack of respect for the transcendent dignity of the human person. When man is not considered within the total context of his vocation, and when the demands of a true »human ecology« are not respected, the cruel forces of poverty are unleashed, as is evident in certain specific areas.”²⁶

The link between natural and human ecology is reflected in the issue of energy resources, which are limited in their availability. We are witnessing that “some parts of the planet remain backward and development is effectively blocked, partly because of the rise in energy prices.”²⁷ The Pope asks urgent questions: “What will happen to those peoples? What kind of development or non-development will be imposed on them by the scarcity of energy supplies? What injustices and conflicts will be provoked by the race for energy sources? And what will be the reaction of those who are excluded from this race? These are questions that show how respect for nature is closely linked to the need to establish, between individuals and between

²⁵ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace [The human person – The heart of peace]. January 1, 2007, no 8. Online: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace [Fighting poverty to build peace]. January 1, 2009, no. 2. Online: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081208_xlii-world-day-peace.html.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2007, no. 9.

nations, relationships that are attentive to the dignity of the person and capable of satisfying his or her authentic needs.”²⁸

In the following paragraph, Benedict XVI develops the idea of the “human ecology” that helps the “tree of peace” to grow. We are inspired by an image of man that is not distorted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests that incite hatred and violence. Although the image of man in various cultures is different, “yet what cannot be admitted is the cultivation of *anthropological conceptions* that contain the seeds of hostility and violence. Equally unacceptable are *conceptions of God* that would encourage intolerance and recourse to violence against others. This is a point which must be clearly reaffirmed: *war in God’s name* is never acceptable!”²⁹

In his Message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 2008), Pope Benedict XVI refers to the relationship between family, which needs a home, and the environment in which the very vocation of the human family is realized. The Pope claims that “*for the human family, this home is the earth*, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion. [We must not] overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all.”³⁰

The issue of ecology meets the social situation in which the various communities of peoples find themselves. In that context, Benedict XVI stresses: “If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need

²⁸ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2007, no. 9.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2007, no. 10.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace [The human family—A community of peace]. January 1, 2008, no. 7. Online: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace.html.

for solidarity with future generations. Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.”³¹

Ecology is the main idea of the fourth chapter “The Development of Peoples, Rights and Duties, the Environment” in encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. Pope Benedict XVI says that “the environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”³² The believer recognizes in nature the marvelous result of God’s creative intervention, which man can use responsibly while preserving and respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. “If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God’s creation.”³³

“Nature is at our disposal not as »a heap of scattered refuse«, but as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order, enabling man to draw from it the principles needed in order ‘to till it and keep it’ (Gen 2:15). But it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person. This position leads to attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism – human salvation cannot come from nature alone, understood in a purely naturalistic sense.”³⁴

There is a constant interaction between humans and the environment. Benedict XVI recalls: “*The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa.* This invites

31 Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace 2008, no. 7.

32 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 48.

33 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 48.

34 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 48.

contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences.”³⁵

The Church cannot stand aside from ecological issues. “*The Church has a responsibility towards creation* and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology.”³⁶ When ‘human ecology’³⁷ is respected within a community, environmental ecology also benefits.

Pope Benedict XVI states that in order to protect the environment, it is not enough to restrict the economy, but to make an effort for moral renewal. “If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves.”³⁸ It is essential to talk about the integrity of human development.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his general audience in Castel Gandolfo on 26 August 2009, spoke of creation as a gift and called on people to be more responsible towards nature. In his address, the pope focused on creation from the perspective of climate change and the environment. “The Earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator who, in designing its intrinsic order, has given us bearings that guide us as stewards of his creation. Precisely from within this framework, the Church considers matters concerning the environment

35 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 51.

36 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 51.

37 Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace 2007, no. 8.

38 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 51.

and its protection intimately linked to the scope of integral human development.”³⁹

In his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, the pope recalls the need not only for a natural but also for a humane ecology. The words of the Vicar of Christ appeal for social justice: “Together we can build an integral human development beneficial for all peoples, present and future, a development inspired by the values of charity in truth. For this to happen it is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater, and shared, acceptance of responsibility for creation: this is demanded not only by environmental factors, but also by the scandal of hunger and human misery.”⁴⁰

During his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI made efforts to awaken the conscience of the responsible authorities on a global scale to treat the protection of the environment with all the seriousness. In our study, we have shown that Pope Benedict XVI used many encounters to inspire people to take an interest in environmental protection and for society to develop not only a natural, but also a human or family ecology.

The ecology of Pope Francis

The Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, chose the name Francis after the conclave in 2013. He claimed the legacy of St. Francis of Assisi, who stood out for his love and reverence for nature, for the work of the Creator. The man who loves and protects creation becomes a leitmotif for the Pope-elect in his search for the right starting point. Ecology is a frequent theme in Francis’ speeches and messages. The ecological crisis appears to be a key concept in the encyclical *Laudato si’*, through which the Holy Father Francis

³⁹ Benedict XVI, General Audience on Safeguarding of Creation (August 26, 2009). Online: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090826.html.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, General Audience on Safeguarding of Creation (August 26, 2009).

wants to challenge people — especially Christians — to a gospel radicalism, manifested in an active commitment to the protection of man and nature. Pope Francis builds on the teachings of his predecessors, further develops the theological doctrine of ecology and places it in the context of integral ecology, considering the interconnectedness of all creation.

Pope Francis approaches creation as a gift that comes from the outstretched hand of God. “The word ‘creation’ has a broader meaning than ‘nature’, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood, and controlled; whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.”⁴¹ Pope Francis recalls the Church’s doctrine of creation and points to the present permanent dimension of God’s love. “Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things. Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world.”⁴² Nature must not be regarded as an object subordinate to the domination of man, through which man can do whatever he wants. The beauty and immensity present in it expresses the commitment that man must accept in relation to it.⁴³ Human beings are called to respect the purpose and usefulness of all living creatures and their function in the ecosystem. Nature has been made available to us by God as a gift, and we are to manage it responsibly — that is, with respect for the rules that have been imposed on it.⁴⁴ One of the arguments presented by Pope Francis against despotic domination over the rest of creation is the ultimate purpose of other creatures. As he reminds, it is not

41 Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 76.

42 Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 77.

43 Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 78, 82.

44 Cf. František, *Posolstvo k Svetovému dňu pokoja 2014*, Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 2014, pp. 27.

to be found in us, “but all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things.”⁴⁵

The Holy Father follows the teaching of his predecessors and points to the interrelationship between nature and creation, since “everything is connected.”⁴⁶ Understood in this way, connectedness is, according to Pope Francis, an image of the mystery of the relationships between the persons of the Holy Trinity. “The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property.”⁴⁷ It is a Trinitarian imprint that can be seen precisely in the context of the whole creation. At this point, Pope Francis refers to St. John Paul II, who said: “When we contemplate with wonder the universe in its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity.”⁴⁸ The ecology of Pope Francis thus develops in close relation to creatology.

Pope Francis invites us to read the biblical texts in their context and in accordance with an authentic hermeneutical approach. The task of earth stewardship is closely related to the care that human beings are to show for one another because they are brothers. All people are related by nature, so each and every individual human being is unique and irreplaceable.⁴⁹ Theological reflections of Pope Francis on the biblical texts on the creation of the world and human beings call for responsibility for all creation. No one can absolve himself of this task. Ultimately, any neglect of “the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose

⁴⁵ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 83.

⁴⁶ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 91.

⁴⁷ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 238.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, Catechesis (August 2, 2000), 4: Insegnamenti 23/2 (2000), 112.

⁴⁹ Cf. František, *Posolstvo k Svetovému dňu pokoja 2015*, Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 2015, pp. 6–7.

care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth.”⁵⁰

The Holy Father Francis considers it important to see life and the things of this world in relation to one another. Environmental problems must also be approached with integrity in order to accept the relationship of man to himself, to others, to the natural environment and, ultimately, to the giver of every gift — to God.⁵¹ Anthropocentrism as currently understood is often an egotistical manifestation of man’s self-conscious attitude of irrational exploitation of nature and its resources, which are meant to serve all. Pope Francis therefore returns once again to the teachings of his predecessors, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and recalls a healthy anthropology that treats man not as master of all, but as a responsible steward who accepts his position in the world according to the intention of the eternal Giver. In the teaching of Pope Francis, it is impossible to advocate for the healing of the relationship with the environment while ignoring the relationship with other human beings and with God.⁵² The notion of “integral ecology” used by the pope puts the doctrine of man’s relationship with the environment into a broader context, understanding it also in relation to the concept of “integral development” advanced by Pope Paul VI in his social encyclical *Populorum progressio*. He understood it as the development of every human being — considering spiritual, economic, social and cultural aspects.

The integral ecology goes beyond the current boundaries of the “here and now”. It transcends the horizon of the present and enters the future, because it is also mindful of the situation in which the future generation will be. When we think about the future, we enter the logic of the selfless gift we receive and share. The theological thought of Pope Francis declares that rational knowledge does not only include awareness and concept of relationships in

⁵⁰ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si’*, no. 70.

⁵¹ Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si’*, no. 117.

⁵² Cf. Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace 2014, no. 2.

the material-visible world that we leave behind, but it is also about the spiritual dimension of the world in its complex-value orientation. The search for an answer to the meaning of our existence is important mainly in relation to the fulfillment of the mission that integral ecology plays and will surely continue to play not only in theological or anthropological understanding, but ultimately in the eschatological fullness of created existence.

Conclusion

The theology of ecology of the post-Conciliar popes, whom we have addressed in our paper, is essentially summarized in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*. It is a call to further development of integral ecology, since all creation is connected and completes the whole in relation to the natural environment. If the subject of the discipline of ecology is the study of relationships between living organisms and their natural environment, we must not forget human beings and their relationships with others. The issue of ecology is also closely connected to social, cultural and economic dimensions. In this reality of mutual relationships, it is also important to develop the Christian anthropology.

Abstract

Ecology of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis

St. John Paul II presents the “ecology of man” in relation to the economic and social problems that affect man in relation to the environment. This approach is developed by Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis approaches the depth of human ecology with a view of the inevitable connectedness of human life with the moral law inscribed in human nature. In this context, he reflects on human body, by which we are brought into direct relationship with the environment and with others. If man accepts his own body as a gift from God, he opens his heart to accept nature as a gift from the Father. Thus, the authenticity of ecology is also manifested in an acceptance of one’s own body, which also requires a careful and responsible treatment. Being mindful towards one’s own body is not an expression of superiority or domination, for such a logic of thinking can be applied to a false logic of domination over creation. By reflecting on human body, Pope Francis also highlights the importance of sexual difference as a unique gift, as a work of God the Creator by which we enrich one another. Such an attitude is an evident concord with the teaching of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church against the unhealthy tendencies of influential groups professing the so-called “gender” ideology. The Popes who are the subject of our interest, drawn their attention to the necessity of a responsible approach to environmental protection in the broad context of created being. So not only in the context of Christian anthropology but also of the entire creatology.

Keywords: ecology of man, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis, environment protection, Christian anthropology

Abstrakt

Ekologia Jana Pawła II, Benedykta XVI i Franciszka

Święty Jan Paweł II przedstawia „ekologię człowieka” w odniesieniu do problemów ekonomicznych i społecznych, które dotyczą człowieka w relacji do środowiska. Podejście to rozwija papież Benedykt XVI. Papież Franciszek podchodzi do głębi ekologii człowieka, mając na uwadze nieunikniony związek życia ludzkiego z prawem moralnym wpisanym w naturę człowieka. W tym kontekście zastanawia się nad ludzkim ciałem, przez które jesteśmy wprowadzeni w bezpośrednią relację ze środowiskiem i z innymi ludźmi. Jeśli człowiek przyjmuje własne ciało jako dar Boga, otwiera swoje serce na przyjęcie przyrody jako daru Ojca. Zatem autentyczność ekologii przejawia się również w akceptacji własnego ciała, które również wymaga uważnego i odpowiedzialnego traktowania. Uważność wobec własnego ciała nie jest wyrazem wyższości czy dominacji, gdyż taka logika myślenia może być zastosowana do fałszywej logiki dominacji nad stworzeniem. Papież Franciszek, podejmując refleksję nad ludzkim ciałem, podkreśla również znaczenie różnicy płciowej jako unikalnego daru, jako dzieła Boga Stwórcy, przez które wzajemnie się ubogacamy. Taka postawa jest ewidentną zgodą z nauczaniem Magisterium Kościoła katolickiego skierowanym przeciwko niezdrowym tendencjom wpływowych grup wyznających ideologię tzw. gender. Papież, którzy są przedmiotem naszego zainteresowania, zwracali uwagę na konieczność odpowiedzialnego podejścia do ochrony środowiska w szerokim kontekście stworzonego bytu – nie tylko w kontekście antropologii chrześcijańskiej, ale i całej kreatologii.

Słowa kluczowe: ekologia człowieka, Jan Paweł II, Benedykt XVI, Franciszek, ochrona środowiska, antropologia chrześcijańska

