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## Theological issues in the ecological<sup>1</sup> encyclical *Laudato si*

### ZAGADNIENIA TEOLOGICZNE W ENCYKLICE LAUDATO SI

Papież Franciszek encyklikę *Laudato si* poświęcił problematyce kryzysu ekologicznego. Treść encykliki ukierunkowuje na podkreślenie prawdy, że człowiek stworzony na obraz i podobieństwo Boga jest w bliskiej relacji ze środowiskiem naturalnym. Relacja ta powinna być odzwierciedleniem odpowiedzialności i troski człowieka. Niedopuszczalne jest zatem takie jego postępowanie, które by miało przyczyniać się do degradacji środowiska i traktowania go wyłącznie eksploatacyjnie.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecology is the branch of biology which is the subject of mutual relationship between living beings (animate or inanimate) and their environment forming in this case the ecosystem. The term „ecology” has received much richer meaning, thanks to public discussion initiated by the Club of Rome in 1972 (the Club of Rome – an international *think tank* organization founded in 1968, bringing together scientists, politicians and businessmen, dedicated to researching and publishing the global problems of the world, including those related to environmental hazards). It defines the scientific knowledge and popular science. It says that a man is highly threatening his environment and at the same time he determines the practical efforts for the long-term, environmentally friendly, removing the threat. By environment we mean here the natural environment, or the entire biosphere with all living beings and ecosystems, as well as remaining closely linked human environment. In journalism, the term „ecology” is understood as a worldview. The importance of this spread in the eighties of the twentieth century. Today the term is used to describe focused on nature or the life of a fundamental human attitude towards the whole of reality. Cf. M. Kehl, *I widział Bóg, że to jest dobre. Teologia stworzenia [And God saw that it was good. Theology of creation]*, Poznań 2008, p. 487-488.

Podjmuje w niej refleksję teologiczną nad tematyką stworzenia. Skupia swoją uwagę nad takimi zagadnieniami jak aspekty biblijne macierzyństwa ziemi, chrystologiczne spełnienie wszechświata, duchowy wymiar relacji we wszechświecie, eschatologiczne spełnienie dzieła stworzenia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Papież Franciszek, encyklika *Laudato si*, ekologia, teologia, wszechświat, ziemia, odpowiedzialność, człowiek.

## Introduction

In the face of the growing crisis of the modern world in various fields of life, part of which is the environmental crisis, more and more often we hear statements of social or political leaders showing the negative effects of invasive operations in human nature.

Pope Francis in the issued encyclical *Laudato si*, attempted to awaken environmental responsibility in all people of good will. The content of the encyclical focused on the issues on the one hand close to every man, because man created in the image and likeness of God has been accommodated in the created world by God and is bound with the natural environment, because he grows up in it and shapes his personality, on the other, far due to the lack of attention to the natural environment to which man really got used to and which he treats often operationally.

Environmental degradation and lack of concern for good and responsible use of it led to the situation when Pope Francis devoted just to this issue a document that is placed the most important of the solemn papal teaching, which is the encyclical. Every encyclical contains a message addressed to the bishops and to the faithful, and is a document drafted by the pope referring to the formalities and doctrine of the Church and the world. This one the Pope dedicated all living in the common home of what is a planet – Earth.

The Pope in his encyclical *Laudato si*<sup>2</sup> also took a reflection on the issues of creation. The main themes that form the structure of the entire document and are articulated throughout the text refer to the idea that all existing beings in the universe are interrelated to each other. The truth about the relational nature of the functioning of the entities

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. The Holy Father Francis, *Encyclical Laudato si* (hereinafter: LS), Kraków 2015.

is confirmed in today's emerging discoveries in quantum physics<sup>3</sup> and the new cosmology<sup>4</sup>. The existence of harmony in the universe is possible by linkages of beings with each other through mutual influence on each other and their complementary functioning. Such an existence is conditioned by its purpose recorded in the structure of every existing being. Noticing cause and effect conditions in the universe is the guarantor for the implementation of God's plan, which he carries out in relation to his creatures. All entities that exist, animate and inanimate, are in relationships and through relationships they verify the identity inscribed in the form of their existence and their tasks. This truth is reflected in the words that were written in the description of creation in Genesis, and which is the expression of acceptance of creatures according to God's plan: "And God saw everything that he had made was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Purposefulness and relational of beings is well anchored in theological argument which confirms that the God of the Christians is not alone but in communion, in the community and personal relationships of Three People always and eternally united internally with each other. This is the concept of the Christian's Triune God. If the Triune God is the one that is expressed in relationships and through a relationship that is the same love, so the whole creation which is his work reflects the relational nature of all beings. From this concept originates another saying that there is an inner relationship between all beings and collective responsibility sharing destiny of the Earth and humanity.

## Biblical aspects of the motherhood of land

In the Bible, in the Book of Genesis we read that God said to the people: "Be fertile and have increase, and make the earth full and be masters of it" (Gen 1:28). In 1967 Lynn White published an article in which he portrayed Christianity from the dock position, due to the growing environmental crisis. In his article he commanded, as if Genesis had to state the reasons on domination of man over creation,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ł. Mściślawski, *Wyzwania realizmu. Strukturalne i konceptualne zagadnienia teorii kwantów w świetle badań nad kwantową grawitacją Chrisa Ishma* [*Challenges of realism. Structural and conceptual aspects of quantum theory in the light of research on quantum gravity by Chris Ishma*], Kraków 2014, p. 150-153.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Peacocke, *Gottes Wirken in der Welt*, Mainz 1998; J. Polkinghorne, *The Interaction of Science and Theology*, Princeton/New Jersey 1987; J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief*, London 1994; J. Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, London 1998.

thus leading to over-exploitation of mineral resources<sup>5</sup>. Carl Amery, the German writer, entitled his book – *The devastating consequences of Christianity*<sup>6</sup>, which would suggest that Christians are in particular responsible for the ecological crisis in the world.

Faced with these attacks, the question arises whether the first order of God, who spoke about to populate the Earth and the capture of the world, there is a major cause of ecological disaster, to which, as we hear more and more often, inevitably the universe is going?

There is an answer to this question in the Book of Genesis. Indeed, man is not the master of creation, but the manager and also the partner of God. The doctrine of creation, which lies in the Book of Genesis, even underlines man's responsibility for the world around him<sup>7</sup>. In addition, Calvin B. DeWitt argues that from the doctrine of creation we can distinguish four basic ecological principles:

- The principle of preserving the earth as the Creator preserves and maintains the world in existence, so humanity must take care of the work of creation and keep them from destruction<sup>8</sup>.
- The principle of “Shabbat”: the creation must be allowed to rest on the exploitation of natural resources<sup>9</sup>.
- The principle of fertility: we should enjoy creatures fertility, not destroy it<sup>10</sup>.
- The principle of limited action: the role of man in creation is limited; there are limits of its activities, which should not be exceeded<sup>11</sup>.

Pope Francis being aware of the depending relationship: God – man – Earth in the first chapter of the encyclical *Laudato si* gives spectrum of threats dictated by the rapid pace of change and the dynamics of technical progress, imposed by a man who often contributed to the degradation of life in the world. A panorama of threats includes: the problems caused by rapidly changing technology and pollution caused by “transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrottoxins in general” (LS 20), global warming, depletion

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. McGrath, *Nauka i religia [Science and religion]*, Kraków 2009, p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ch. Schoenborn, *Cel czy przypadek? [Target, or an accident?]*, Kielce 2009, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. McGrath, *Nauka i religia [Science and Religion]*, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

of natural resources and the problem of clean water for drinking as well as gradually evolving nature as “loss of woodlands and forests (...), the disappearance of thousands of species of plants and animals (...), the destruction of ecosystems and coral reefs (cf. LS 38-41) shows their direct and indirect impact on the deterioration of the quality of life and social collapse of many of the poorest inhabitants of the planet Earth. Worth noting is the weakness of international politics, subordinated technical – economic paradigm, as well as rising corruption and mock ecology.

But let's concentrate on theological grounds, which are used by the Pope from the second chapter, pointing to the need for help of belief in a conscious and responsible use of the environment in which we live, which gave mother earth. The Pope inspires not only believers but all people of good will to “assemble a synthesis of faith and reason” (LS 62) and “together we can seek paths of liberation” (...) to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters”(LS 64). For Christians, faith is an important incentive, which “promotes environmental protection, which (people) are part of (...) to treat their responsibility as order within creation and their responsibilities towards nature and the Creator as part of their faith” (LS 64 ). The dialogue between ethics, the search for scientific, political responsibility, concern for the destiny of the planet Earth and a willingness to care for the “common house” which is the voice of the Pope seems to be essential in order to motivate the thinking and actions of Christians united in faith and teaching coming from word of God contained in the Bible.

The first and most important place on earth is man. His special relationship, by virtue of being made out of love in the image and likeness of God, has contributed to the exceptional dignity, self-knowledge, self-control and ability to create community (cf. LS 65). The man has been turned into a unique cycle, which is headed by God in his providence. Earth, which was endowed with the quality of motherhood. The Pope assures: “each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!” (LS 65). And he adds: “The Creator can tell each of us: ,Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5)” (LS 65). Pope Francis explains that the man's unite three closely linked basic relations: the relationship with God, with others and with the earth (cf. LS 66). The earth is our mother, had existed and provided relevant to life products so it favours the preservation of life not only of man but of all living creatures on it. The man was given Mother Earth, received it as a gift, did not choose

but received along with the task “to cultivate and care products” (cf. Gen 2:15). The Pope explains, “the practice of plowing and cultivating means (...), care means protecting, safeguarding, preserving, defending, vigil. This entails responsible relationship of reciprocity between man and nature” (LS 67). The special relationship between man and Earth, through which enjoys the natural environment meant that “man is called to respect creation, together with the laws governing it (...) because in relation to other creatures we could speak about priority (man) *to be before to be useful*” (LS 68).

Respect for the earth as Mother was expressed by the pope in pointing out that man cannot and should not operate land indefinitely, it has its own rhythm which results in a constant birth and delivery of products necessary for human life. This rhythm, however, requires respect out of justice the rest periods, “inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator” (LS 71). Pope writes: “We see this, for example, in the law of the Sabbath. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a *Sabbath*, (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Ex 16:23; 20:10). Similarly, every seven years, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, a complete rest for the land (cf. Lev 25:1-4), when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one’s household (cf. Lev 25:4-6). Finally, after seven weeks of years, which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and “liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (cf. Lev 25:10). Pope Francis also notes that this law came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in their relationships with others and with the land...” (LS 71).

The Pope in the second chapter of the encyclical, entitled *The Gospel of creation*, realizes its dual objectives. In the light of the conditions of theology he wants to bring closer the believers current ecological issues that the Church overworked and deepened while to the unbelievers he wants to show clearly the biblical and spiritual foundations which are to become both for one and the other, an incentive to undertake the task of respect for motherhood land, the protection of creation and the natural environment and the strengthening of a more just and fraternal world. Through subsequent pages of the encyclical he comments the mystery of the universe in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which considers the relationship between man and nature on the one hand so that to de-mythologise it and not admit the divine character, on the other hand to hold it in the “project of love of God in which every being has value and meaning (LS 76) because “the

universe was not created as a result of arbitrary omnipotence, as a manifestation of the strength or the will of self-affirmation, creation belongs to the order of love” (LS 77).

It is important to differentiate the terms: nature – a creature, that uses the Pope. The scope of semantic notion of creation is broader than that contained in the notion of nature. Nature refers to the reality of which man associates and which he knows, from which he draws the knowledge of how from the best mother and which he enriches through daily intercourse with it. Creation includes a quality that is associated with God’s plan of love and therefore this expanded the categories of external played out on the level of relationships: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” (Ps 33, 6). The existence of created beings conditioned by the presence of the Creator who called them into existence. “You love all things, and loathe nothing that what you have done, because if you had something to hate, you would not have” (Wis 11, 24). The Pope refers to the basic principle in creatology *creatio ex nihilo*<sup>12</sup>. God is the only Creator of the universe and the beings in it called into existence. Motherhood of land contains a different truth *creatio* and *nihili*. God sustains the works of art created in existence and does so through repeating a cycle of fertility of the earth. Creation is 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” (LS 76). Nature is closer to the mother earth, which is capable of continuous birth only because “the world is derived from a decision” (...) the love of God is the root cause of all creation. An important role is played by the Spirit, who “filled the universe of possibilities, so that from the very womb of things can always give birth to something new” (LS 79).

Pope Francis in this section, so much theological, retains the style of writing and varied colors and citations that characterized him in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*<sup>13</sup>. In this way he wants to confirm the identity of each of the men is associated with nature, in which man lives and lived, which by analogy can be compared to a caring mother who looks after their children and providing everything they need for natural growth. The Pope not only reminds that maternal nature of this “soil, water, mountains” (LS 84), but also indicates the source of its origin, which is the tenderness of God” (LS 84).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Z. J. Kijas, *Początki świata i człowieka, [Origins of the world and man]*, Kraków 2004, p. 126-144.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. The Holy Father Francis, *Adhortacja apostolska Evangelii Gaudium [The Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium]*, Kraków 2013.

Pope Francis referring to the memories even more individual and personal, that everyone can be regarded as their own because dictated by personal experience of the past, shows the enduring principle of “who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves” (LS 84). This is a unique experience, underlines the Pope, and adds that the community of the universe to which we are involved is not associated with the trend of destruction of it, but it is band relationships, memory, history, passion and solidarity which include not only human beings but all creation: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (LS 92).

## Christological aspects of the fulfillment of the universe

Throughout the second chapter we can note the development of theological reflection about ecology through a consideration which leads the pope, referring to the various passages in the Old and New Testaments, both of these basic as the description of creation in Genesis, as well as from the source of the poetry – prayer psalms from the Book of Psalms to the exhorting and full of warnings from the Books of the Prophets. Old Testament texts represent the encyclical prelude to the central Christological theme. Pope reveals an authentic vision of doxological relationship between Jesus, the Son of God who became man and the earth on which he lived as one of us. The look of Jesus renews gaze of God the Creator, who saw beautiful and good things as they were created. It’s a look that no one had before because he looks at the world with the eyes of God and man. The life of Jesus was full, which fits in both the natural and cultural environment between men and women of Palestine, in his time, the life beautiful for full harmony with the creatures, good as based on love and care for creatures, blessed as it is capable of reading the transformation, which is expected this earth and this sky to become a “new earth and new heaven”.

In the last paragraphs of the second chapter, which is a genuine theological foundation of the whole encyclical – Pope Francis draws attention to the “universal destination of goods” accommodated in the universe. The Pope explains, echoing St. John Paul II that “is not consistent with God’s plan to dispose of the gift (the common good

which is the earth) so that its benefits were available only to a few (LS 93). To give this account the relevant reference should again take into account the gaze of Jesus, which suggests a diagnosis of “fatherly relationship with all creatures” (LS 96), the need for harmony with nature, animate and inanimate through a lifestyle that would be far “from philosophy despised the body, matter and the things of this world “(LS 98). Pope Francis reminds, however, that no Church has always managed to maintain solidarity and merciful gaze of Jesus on creation. There were in fact “undoubtedly the harmful duality that had a significant impact on some Christian thinkers throughout history and which distorted the Gospel” (LS 98).

Pope refers to the biblical sources in a special way for the content of the Gospel and those contained in the letters of Paul, presenting at the same time creating a work of the Triune God, that is, as the work of God the Father fulfilled by His Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of the eternal, the architect of creation is the Son of God through whom all things were created: “For us there is only one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist and we are (1 Cor 8: 6). The Son of God is, “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1: 15), is the one through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1: 3; Col 1: 16-17). The Son of God is the mediator of the whole creation, is the foundation of the existence of the whole creation and therefore the universe.

Creation is the work of God the Father “all things through him and for him they were created” (Col 1: 16). It is the work of the Son, “without whom nothing was made that was made, in Him was life” (Jn 1: 3-4) and who is the “heir of all things, by whom also he (God) created the universe” (Heb 1:2) because the whole creation in him “was united, revived and renewed” (cf. Eph 1:10) so that” God may be all in all “(1 Cor 15: 28). The universe so it is not only a work of God, its Creator, as the Old Testament revealed this truth, it is inhabited by God, is designed to salvation and glory, it is invited to the wedding with God through His Son, who became man made possible residence in human, created body, the fullness of life of God. Only in such a theological interpretation directed in a christocentric way it is possible to restore proper reality created in Christ, through Christ and in the eyes of Christ and the approach of our vocation and destiny of the universe to salvation and transformation and completion is predictable.

These paragraphs of the encyclical offer reading, which may prove very little familiar also to the believers. However, they are key to

understanding the basic fact of the Christian faith, emphasizing that the Father through the Son is inextricably united from the beginning of time of the world with the earth, the universe and humanity, the Son of God is the firstborn of creation. It was beautifully presented one of the pillars of the cathedral in Chartres, in the face of the Son Jesus Christ is accommodated in perspective calculates Adam created in his image. Fathers medieval with wisdom and common sense say that God in creating Adam looked at the pattern which was His firstborn Son, the Only Begotten, our first brother. Adam came to earth as the first, created by God but before him the prototype became the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Therefore let us make everything to look Jesus also became our look at the whole created world. And when it comes to that we will certainly be surprised that “the same wild flowers and birds, which admired his human eyes (Risen), are now filled with His shining presence” (LS 100). Nothing else is left to us as soon as they let our hearts, life and everything around us shine.

## Spiritual aspects of the relationship in the universe

Pope Francis looking on the environment through the eyes of faith, sees in him God’s creation that has been entrusted to man by God to be looked after and cared for. The relationship of man to nature, that is to the natural living environment and to other creatures, requires a different quality of life, calls for changes from the consumer to awaken in the direction of respect for life and care for the environment.

The primary virtue of creatures, underlines the Pope Francis, which refers to the Creator is the joy and gratitude (LS 210). It can be said that gratitude is one of the foundations of Christian spirituality. Through it man can best and most fully respond to God’s creative action. With an attitude of gratitude man turns out to be a real creature that sees, recognizes and appreciates the truth, which is the world, which is a gift<sup>14</sup>. The relationship of man to God should be in accordance with the will of God reflected in man’s relation to other creatures that is a gift<sup>15</sup>.

Pope calls that human in his spiritual development should also care about environmental education, which will raise awareness and prevent threats to the environment (LS 210). Education people need to realize that nature has been given to him as an inherent conditionality of its operations, without which nothing would be able to do. This

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. Kehl, *I widział Bóg, że to jest dobre. Teologia stworzenia [And God saw that it was good. The theology of creation]*, p. 492.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

is about the basic and most important elements, such as water, light, oxygen, etc. Nature has its limits, which define a limit to man when it comes to handling it. In the concrete situation it is very difficult to determine these limits on the use of pre-existing natural gifts. It should be emphasized, however, that the willingness to accept certain impassable boundaries in the treatment of the natural living environment, its resources and other living creatures, plants, animals makes a man becomes more responsible in their thinking and actions.

Earth with all animals and natural goods has been entrusted to man as a deposit, which is not his own. It cannot belong to the individual, society, or the entire population. God gave it to man as his manager, to be cared for and looked after it. That is why man can use its wealth, but there is one condition – he must take care of it, there are enough stocks for the future generations. The man conscious having the earth as a deposit realizes that he will have to tell God at the end whether he handled appropriately with the gift entrusted to him.

The Pope suggests the practice of ecological conversion (cf. LS 216-221). The experience of personal relationships, reveals a difference, where the best form of unity is not blurring in uniformity, but recognition in created beings differences which divide them. Only such an attitude enables man the recognition of specific elements of all creation and recognition of their value. According to the Pope, ecological conversion is the richness of Christian spirituality, which also must be focused on the responsibility for nature. Human bears ethical responsibility for creation (LS 221). If man is created in the image of God, so that he could represent Him to the other creatures as their Lord.

## Responsibility in the eschatological trust

Pope Francis writes in the encyclical that: at the end of life (...) person will be able to read the mystery of joyful wonder of the universe, which will be participating fully with a man without end (LS 242). It is an incentive to maintain the eschatological perspective as a complement of the reality of human existence and the existence of the universe.

It is a proposal that is based on a combination of faith in creation with eschatological hope. Even if a man would lead to the total destruction of all creatures of the earth, the earth does not collapse into nothingness. Ecological catastrophe cannot be equated with an annihilation of any sense of the earth and all life upon it. It is crucial that the promises of God can change even the worst of human behavior or

the heaviest human guilt. The Pope adds, “with all creatures we are pilgriming on this earth, seeking God (...)” (LS 244). It is therefore essential human contribution to the work of the completion of the world, which will take place in the eschatological perspective of the completion of all things in God. “Although having all make up the kingdom of God is entirely the work of God, but God is not indifferent whether we, the people, live according to the original command given in the description of creation – or for expected from him the fulfilling gift we offer him well-managed land or land increasingly plundering and devastated. In completed kingdom of God old creature is not kept on the sidelines and left, but – cleaned and renovated – is transformed by God into a new creation and so “elevated” will remain. Therefore, the command given at the beginning of man means that – according to their possibilities – he is supposed to transform the ground into the “stuff” of the kingdom of God that all lifts up and completes<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, all human actions should aim to ensure that the world was in a relationship aimed towards the realization of the will of God. The will means that the full of goodness, which gives God should emanate from every creature, through a variety ways of its incarnation. Therefore man should serve God, not only by the theological virtues (faith, love, hope), but also through concrete actions. The pope asserts: “God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way.” (LS 245).

## Instead of conclusion

Chris Patten, British Environment Minister, said: “The relationship between man and his environment is based – and always will be based – on something more than just – sensible science and economics. For the individual human relationship is also of metaphysical nature. Believers can – if they’re lucky – experience the beauty as well as utility in the world, which is another manifestation of God’s love and creative power<sup>17</sup>.

**Key words:** Pope Francis, encyclical *Laudato si*, ecology, theology, Universe, Earth, responsibility, man.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kehl, *I widział Bóg, że to jest dobre. Teologia stworzenia [And God saw that it was good. The theology of creation]*, p. 504.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. J. Berry, *Bóg i biologia [God and biology]*, Kraków 2005, p. 144.

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