

## Pope Francis's Proposition of Integral Ecology

### Papieża Franciszka propozycja ekologii integralnej

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#### Abstract

In spite of the fact that Pope Francis's environmental message is not the first one to be formulated by the authorities of the Catholic Church, it is in this particular one that threads become visible which allow to see in it new, far-reaching analyses and conclusions. The aim of the present article is to indicate these elements which make it possible to draw such conclusions, both in relation to perceiving the sources of the environmental crisis and showing the ways of overcoming it. It is a realistic and coherent attitude, striving for harmony between people and nature, within human communities, between humans and God, and, finally, between science and faith. Undoubtedly, such Francis's orientation towards peculiar environmental integralism and synergism is the most characteristic feature of his propositions of overcoming environmental threats.

**Key words:** Pope Francis, environmentalism, humans, personalism, nature, integrity

#### Streszczenie

Pomimo tego, iż ekologiczne przesłanie papieża Franciszka nie jest pierwszym formułowanym przez władze Kościoła katolickiego, to uwidaczniają się w nim wątki zdecydowanie pozwalające dostrzec w nim nowe i daleko idące analizy i konkluzje. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie na te elementy, które pozwalają na wysuwanie takich właśnie wniosków, zarówno co do postrzegania źródeł kryzysu ekologicznego, jak i wskazywania dróg do jego przewyciężenia. Jest to stanowisko realistyczne i koherentne, dążące do harmonii ludzi z naturą, w obrębie ludzkich społeczności, między człowiekiem a Bogiem, a wreszcie nauką i wiarą. Nie ulega wątpliwości, iż to nastawienie Franciszka na swoisty integralizm i synergizm ekologiczny, stanowi najbardziej charakterystyczny rys jego propozycji przewyciężenia zagrożeń ekologicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Papież Franciszek, ekologia, człowiek, personalizm, natura, integralność

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#### Introduction

The Catholic Church's attitude to the natural environment, and particularly to its protection in the context of the environmental crisis which is evident today, is the subject of numerous and very often fierce polemics. They result in extremely antithetical conclusions: from seeing Christianity as a promoter of environmentalism, to even believing it favours the destruction of nature, which is supposed to have its source already in the Bible (Kijas Z., 2004, p. 163). In turn, Catholic circles identify environmentalism, at least suspiciously and not always accurately, with broadly understood *New Age*, *Gender Ideology* and extreme leftist views, which in their opinion negate the theocentric vision of the world, if not the exist-

ence of God directly (Drane, 1993, p. 142). More or less correctly, environmental movements are accused here of being pro-abortion and pro-euthanasia, and thus of prioritising the protection of the integrity of the environment over the concern for the human-kind.

While the necessity to involve philosophy or theology inspired by Christian reflection in the general project of environmental protection essentially does not raise any major doubts today, the manner of implementing it is not so unambiguous at all and there is no uniform narration to be spoken of (Horowski, 2011). During the last decade, the centre of the ideological dispute between the Catholic Church and its various opponents (also those considered as such by the Church itself) shifted mostly to the sphere of *gen-*

*der ideology*. However, Pope Francis undoubtedly introduced to the environmental question contents which make his voice in this area recognisable as exceptionally strong, not only for people who identify themselves with Catholicism. Moreover, it is difficult to overlook that it is precisely in some environments associating themselves with this religion, especially in the conservative ones, that the Pope's evidently pro-environmental attitude is almost openly contested. In spite of the fact that Pope Francis's environmental message is not the first one to be formulated by the authorities of the Catholic Church, it is in this particular one that threads become visible which allow to see in it new, far-reaching analyses and conclusions. The aim of the present article is to indicate these elements which make it possible to draw such conclusions, both in relation to perceiving the sources of the environmental crisis and showing the ways of overcoming it. It is a realistic and coherent attitude, striving for harmony between people and nature, within human communities, between humans and God, and, finally, between science and faith. Undoubtedly, such Francis's orientation towards peculiar environmental integralism and synergism is the most characteristic feature of his propositions of overcoming environmental threats.

It is worth observing here that as early as in 1972, Pope Paul VI issued a document entitled *The Holy See's Position on the Protection of the Natural Environment*. Basing on realistic and pragmatic premises, it stated that as humans are one with nature, it is necessary to replace current brutal exploitation with respect for biosphere seen as a whole (Irek, 2008, p. 112). Following the same direction, John Paul II included among the positive signs of the present times the growing awareness of the limited nature of available resources, strongly criticising demagogic concepts in this area. Presumably with a purely technological approach to nature and radical environmental movements in mind, he juxtaposed them with *ecological concern* (John Paul II, 1987, no. 26). He appealed for change in the current methods of protection of the planet's resources and for striving for sustainable development based on principles of solidarity, as well as for shaping environmental awareness (John Paul II, 1990, p. 106-109); he encouraged global *ecological conversion* (John Paul II, 2001, no. 4). In Pope Benedict XVI's quite rich reflections on this issue, the attitude to the natural environment appears mostly as an important factor of the full development of humans (Horowski, 2010, p. 65-82).

There are no doubts that Pope Francis was the first to consider the environmental question to be so essential to devote to it an ecclesiastical document of greatest significance, the encyclical *Laudato si'*, issued on 24 May 2015. He started from the premise, as he himself writes, that Christianity, remaining faithful to its identity, has to continuously reflect on these issues and make new statements in dialogue

with new historical situations (*LS*, no. 121). The starting point for this dialogue must be a diagnosis of symptoms and causes of the environmental crisis.

### 1. Manifestations of the environmental crisis and its origins

It was already John Paul II who pointed out that humans, especially within the highly developed technological and industrial civilisation, have become ruthless exploiters of nature on a large scale, often treating it instrumentally, destroying many of its riches and charms. Arrogance and pride of policy makers and investors, as he wrote, lead to the madness of consumerism, exploitation of resources and random development (John Paul II, 1979, no. 15).

In relation to this issue, Pope Francis seems to connect a number of planes. Thus, he makes clear references to scientific sources which unambiguously speak of an environmental disaster and indicate its sources. He is very critical of the phenomenon of technical development which depreciates the human welfare understood in personalist terms. Linking the environmental crisis directly with the culture of rejecting people who for various reasons are considered superfluous, he builds a synergic image of the environmental crisis and the anomie of social bonds. From the point of view of the faith – which is quite evident – he sees the sources of this disaster in secularisation and the moral crisis, or in overlooking humans' commitment to the Creator of this world. Moreover, the encyclical is permeated with authentic, human concern, characterised by a lively and emotional spirit of a person who loves nature and who by no accident, for the first time in the history of the papacy, chose the name of St. Francis of Assisi.

Forgetting that we ourselves are formed from the dust of the earth, we have led to a situation when [Our] *sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods* (Francis, 2015, no. 2, subsequent quotations: *LS*). As a number of scientific studies indicate, the pope writes, *most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (...) released mainly as a result of human activity* (*LS*, no. 23). Furthermore, he states unambiguously, contrary to the views preferred by many countries, including Poland, that this crisis is aggravated by deforestation for agricultural purposes, and especially by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels. He recognises it is urgent and indispensable to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy (*LS*, no. 26). Moreover, Francis has no doubt that economic and political authorities, masking or concealing the symptoms of the environmental cri-

sis, do not have enough courage to radically change currently preferred models of production and consumption (*LS*, no. 26). It is difficult to overlook the fact that it is in the area of environmentalism that populism may be reaching dramatic proportions.

### 1.1. *Spiritual and moral crisis*

From the point of view of Catholic personalism, humans, making wrong use of their freedom differentiating them from other beings created by God, negate His plan and, sinning, rule the Earth like a tyrant (Bajda, 2001, p. 227). John Paul II directly puts forward a thesis about extensive structures of evil and social sin which gives rise to more than just the environmental crisis (John Paul II, no. 15-17). It is also in Pope Francis's view that the symbolic turning point in the relationship between humans and nature is marked by the fall of the first people in paradise, who through their disobedience to God and his laws destroyed the unity between people and at the same time disturbed the harmony of the entire creation. The murder of Abel ruptured the relationship between Cain and God, and between Cain and the earth from which he was banished (*LS*, no. 70). Our home, Earth (*LS*, no. 21), our *Sister* cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her (*LS*, no. 2). A crime against the natural world is both a crime against ourselves and a sin against God (*LS*, no. 8).

Destroying the foundations of their life, the biological and abiotic environment, humans cause perturbations in the moral, spiritual, cultural, and social sphere. These are mostly the connotations of uncritical practical application of scientific and technological achievements, depreciation of the personal dignity inherent to every man without any exceptions, or primitive consumerism (Zięba, 2002, p. 222-23). The difficulty in taking up the environmental challenge seriously is strictly related to an ethical and cultural decline (*LS*, no. 162). As the external deserts in the world are growing, the internal deserts are also becoming vaster and vaster, writes Pope Francis (*LS*, no. 217). The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. In this context, he or she is unable to accept the limits imposed by reality (*LS*, no. 204).

A synthetic consequence of the moral and spiritual crisis, and at the same time its strong stimulant, is undoubtedly the above-mentioned consumerism. It was already John Paul II who wrote about the phenomenon of excessive consumption, or radical insatiability which pushes people to mindlessly exploit the world's resources, especially in the modern rich societies, contributing to the destruction of the natural environment (John Paul II, 1991, 36-37). Pope Francis also directly associates the environmental crisis with consumerism. Referring to specific phenomena, he writes that it is the increase in consumption that creates the combination of problems related

to environmental pollution, transport, waste treatment, loss of resources (*LS*, no. 50). Even if there is a growing ecological sensitivity today, it is not enough to change the harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be intensifying and developing (*LS*, no. 55). In a similar spirit of realism, or rather pessimism, the pope emphasises that even if young people of today have a greater ecological sensitivity, they are growing up in an environment of extreme consumerism and affluence, which makes it difficult to develop other, desirable habits in this area (*LS*, no. 209). A compulsive, almost obsessive mechanism of consumption is created, getting a considerable proportion of the population caught up in a whirlwind of often needless shopping (*LS*, no. 203). Consumerism, as the pope insightfully concludes, poses a major challenge for integral ecology, as in the globalised reality it is not juxtaposed with a strongly homogeneous culture. It is difficult to overlook the phenomena of diminishing the immense cultural variety, which is the heritage of all humanity (*LS*, no. 144).

Referring to the category of cultural and aesthetic values of nature, the pope cannot accept the fact that with the advance of consumerism, the Earth is becoming less rich and beautiful, more limited and grey, while the offers of consumption develop continuously and limitlessly. At the same time, we are deluding ourselves, as the pope rightly concludes, that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves (*LS*, no. 34). It is also impossible to be indifferent to the rhetorical question Pope Francis asks the humankind: *Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wrecking distractions, or the cult of appearances?* (*LS*, no. 225).

### 1.2. *Technological exaltation*

Apart from negating the environmental problem as a result of convenient indifference and consumerism, the pope blames human blind faith in technological means for the devastation of nature. Placing technology over nature, contemporary anthropocentrism ceased to perceive the latter as a shelter for life, and this stands in the way of shared understanding. Unlawfully granting themselves the prerogatives of an absolute ruler of nature, humans slipped into, as the pope uncompromisingly observes, a peculiar technocratic exaltation (*LS*, no. 114-118). One-dimensional technological paradigm, based on possession, mastery and transformation of nature, results in a situation when human intervention in nature, which has always been present, today does not mean accompanying it and respecting the possibilities it itself offers us (*LS*, no. 106).

It does not escape the attention of the pope, who appears to present strongly leftist perception of economic issues, that capitalism is responsible for the indifference to the fate of nature. Whatever is fragile,

like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule (LS, no. 56). The alliance between the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests (LS, no. 54). Nuclear energy, biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA, and many other abilities offer their often tremendous power to those who have the economic resources to use it to rule over nature and people (LS, no. 104). The pope does not leave any doubts, or a space for optimism, when he concludes that technology is ultimately not about profit or the well-being of the human race, but about power, lordship in the extreme meaning in the new structure of the world (LS, no. 108).

Francis also seems to be correct in assessing the source of this peculiar dementia which manifests itself when humans use the tool of science. Thus, he comes to a conclusion that specialisation and fragmentation of knowledge make it problematic for people to be able to perceive the whole, which is extremely important, as well as to perceive the meaning of the relationships between things (LS, no. 20, 110). He correctly states that contemporary man has not been trained to use well the power brought about by knowledge. The immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development of humans in relation to responsibility, values and conscience (LS, no. 105). As a consequence, an authentic humanity, as the pope metaphorically writes, seems to dwell in the midst of the technological civilisation almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping beneath a closed door (LS, no. 112).

### 1.3. The environmental crisis and the culture of exclusion

Completely irrational destruction of the natural environment is accompanied by too little attention devoted to the question of *human ecology*, although it is humans, the very *heart* of nature, who pay the highest price for its destruction (Delsol, 2003, p. 21). Expressing his preference for integral ecology, the pope argues in this spirit that the processes of degradation of the human environment and the natural environment occur simultaneously (LS, no. 48), and the environmental crisis directly reflects the crisis of interpersonal relations and bonds, especially in families (LS, no. 107, 119).

It is difficult to disagree with the pope's conclusion that the consequence of humans' tyrannical approach to nature and its egoistic or even brutal treatment are the still visible economic and social inequalities (LS, no. 26). A misguided anthropocentrism, together with the culture of relativism, creates a space for a pathological lifestyle according to which not only nature, but also people are taken advantage of, treated as mere objects, forced to work almost like slaves. In line with the same logic, the elderly persons who no longer serve our interests are aban-

doned, and children are sexually exploited (LS, no. 122-123).

The pope points to a close correlation between the crisis of the environment and of the human in the aspect of the so-called *quality* of their life, which today is so emphasized and desired. It is difficult to overlook the fact that the throwaway culture today affects objects which quickly become rubbish and pose a threat to the environment, but also billions of the excluded people (LS, no. 22, 43, 49). In no case can the world be analysed by isolating only one of its aspects, since the book of nature is one and indivisible (LS, no. 6). The environmental crisis is inextricably linked with the sufferings of the people pushed onto the margins of the society (LS, no. 13). Many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the local sources of livelihood, but also destroy the social resources themselves (LS, no. 145). Although it is often, the pope writes with a lot of sad realism, that we see beautiful green areas in well-kept gated communities, it is rarely the case in the places where those rejected by the society live (LS, no. 45). Moreover, Francis puts forward an accurate hypothesis about an *ecological debt* between the north and south. Although the land of the southern poor is rich and less polluted, access to goods and resources for meeting basic needs is blocked by a structurally perverse system of commercial relations and ownership (LS, no. 52-53). The pope also anticipates that in the face of the depletion of some resources, the scene will be set for new wars, which by their very nature also increase the destruction wrought on nature (LS, no. 57).

## 2. Specific understanding of nature's autotelicity

One of the elements which seem to condition concern for nature is the acknowledgement of its value, which, however, may have differing connotations. Obviously, Christian reflection excludes the possibility of putting forward a thesis concerning certain autotelicity of nature, as its existence is determined by the Creator and humans who are transcendental in relation to it. It was especially in the long period of the Middle Ages, when religion truly regulated people's way of thinking and living, that symptoms of the awareness of closeness of nature and brotherly relations with it were clearly noticeable. Another idea which remained strong was that of looking for God's signs in nature, as it reveals Him alongside the Bible and in this sense constitutes a reliable source of knowledge of God (Morin, 1998, p. 13). Benedictine monks, who covered the entire western Europe with a network of their monasteries, cultivated the land and looked after animals on their own, developing a specific model of cooperation with the world of nature. Within this model, the role of humans is to manage nature, domesticate and tame it with grati-

tude, respect, and even dedication. Controlling wild and unpredictable nature is indispensable from the point of view of humans, as it can easily overcome them (Dębowski, 1996, p. 42-43).

St. Francis of Assisi, who, in contrast to St. Benedict, chose the life of a wanderer, had a different vision of an order and did not left the tasks from the *homo faber* category to his fellow friars. His poverty and austerity, as Pope Francis emphasises, were no external asceticism, but a radical refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled (LS, no. 11). For him, nature was a source of joy, admiration, prayer, and gratitude for the gift of life. He was also convinced that every creature reflects God's presence and brings us closer to Him. In the brotherly treatment of creatures which is being shaped here, there is no desire for dominance or transformation of nature. For Francis, the whole of nature, without even making a distinction between wildlife and inanimate nature, shows God's glory just like people, and is subordinated to Him to the same extent as they are. In this understanding, devastation of nature is devastation of God's order, although in this perspective, a distinction between the Creator and creations is still justified (Derdziuk, 2002, p. 205-209). Acknowledging the fact that St. Francis inspires many people today, on 29 October 1979 John Paul II declared him the Patron Saint of Ecologists (Ganowicz-Bącznyk, 2011, p. 25-26). However, there is no doubt that it is Pope Francis for whose vision of the world this saint is the fundamental point of reference. The model of brotherly relations with nature constitutes for the pope the essence of his understanding of nature and perception of the environmental crisis; it also sets the direction for shaping ecological culture.

Nature remains here a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of His beauty and goodness (LS, no. 12). Rejecting any form of biocentrism or sacralisation of nature, we should see it as much more than just matter. In Catholic perspective, the natural environment remains a bearer of values, as its creation is an implementation of the Creator's idea (LS, no. 78). Destroying it, people erase God's *handprints* present in the world, and introduce asymmetry not only in the relationships with the world, but also with its Creator (Naumowicz, 2009, p. 229; Salij, 2009, p. 128; Rogowski, 2008, p. 14-17). Pope Francis also strongly emphasizes the thesis that nature is associated with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance, being a gift *from the outstretched hand of the Father of all* (LS, no. 76). The universe was not created as the result of God's arbitrary omnipotence, a manifestation of force or will, but is an act of His love (LS, no. 77).

We cannot overlook the fact that it is the humans that are an image of God; however, each creature has its own purpose and none is unnecessary: soil, water, mountains are the language of God's limitless love

to us. It was Him who has written a precious book whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe. Through contemplation, believers can hear the person and the message of the Creator himself, the owner of all the creation (LS, no. 79, 84-86, 89). When are aware of God's reflection in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all His creatures and to worship Him with them, like Francis of Assisi did (LS, no. 87). The world is not just a problem to be solved, but a joyful, admirable mystery (LS, no. 12), a kind of God's art (LS, no. 80). Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Jesus clearly encouraged sensitivity to the beauty that there is in the world, as he himself was, writes the pope, in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of love and wonder (LS, no. 97-99). Thus, it is not enough to think of different species as potential *resources* which can be exploited, forgetting the fact that they have value in themselves. We have no right to cause thousands of species to stop give glory to God by their existence or convey their message to us (LS, no. 33). All creatures, including us, are connected; all mutually need one another; each must be cherished with love and admiration (LS, no. 42). Obviously, it is difficult to derive from this message a thesis about nature's complete autonomy in relation to humans. However, being closely linked to its Creator, nature is marked with its sacredness, which allows us to speak of its autotelic character that rules out its dependence on humans.

### 3. Human transcendence in relation to nature

However, in the entire Judeo-Christian perspective it is striking that there is a clear distinctness, separateness and transcendence of humans over the countless beings of the world of nature. Even if anthropological considerations have sometimes pointed to the similarity of the human – a *microcosm* – to other beings in nature, humans' unique position in the hierarchy of beings, related to their conscious and free activity, has also been emphasized (Łepko, 2006, p. 138-139). God's prerogatives over nature cannot be ascribed to human beings, but they are the only ones who were shaped in the image and likeness of the Creator. It is only them who are partners for God, His true *interlocutors* on the earth. It was them, the most important point in nature, for whom it had been created in its beauty, whom God offered creative cooperation in its sphere (Delsol, 2003, p. 21).

Even if the modern *homo oeconomicus* has transformed the paradigm of their power over nature into the principle of dominance and maximal exploitation, it should rather be seen as delegation, which should be characterised by wisdom and love. God has given humans the mission of servile rule over nature, in which its rights are respected. The idea of this rule is illuminated by the metaphor of concern for God's garden, emphasizing humans' closeness to God and not their dominion over nature. The role of

God's gardener excludes any form of violence towards nature or its destruction (Ganoczy, 1999, p. 37). As a rational collaborator of God and, in a sense, His representative, man cannot be a tyrant and ruthless exploiter, but a *shepherd* (John Paul II, 1979, no. 15)].

Referring to this problem and indicating an obsession, sometimes manifested in present times, with denying the human person any pre-eminence over other species, Pope Francis sees the need to fight to protect humans' unique dignity (*LS*, no. 90). Putting himself – like in any question – in the position of an environmental centrist, he indicates that *the world of the human person*, endowed with intelligence and love, is superior over the material, biological and animal world, but closely related to them and dependent on them for its existence. We cannot put all the living creatures on an equal level, thus depriving humans of that special worth which at the same time entails serious responsibility (*LS*, no. 83). It is this attitude of self-transcendence and the rejection of isolation and self-absorption that are the sources of concern for other people and the natural environment (*LS*, no. 208).

#### 4. Ecological culture as responsibility for the common good

Just as John Paul II suggested entering into dialogue with everybody in relation to our common home, Pope Francis also expresses his conviction (*LS*, no. 3) that the environmental crisis must provoke a responsible reaction of all, as the common destiny of the humankind, a radical interdependence in the world leave us but one alternative – we may either *construct together* or cause a *catastrophe for all* (John Paul II, 1987, no. 26). The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system which significantly affects human life, in any place and region (*LS*, no. 23). Thus, in the sphere of referring to the common good, dialogue, though by its very nature difficult, is indispensable because, as the pope concludes realistically, antithetic attitudes are revealed here. Some people uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves with the application of new technology, without ethical considerations or deep change. Others claim that as humankind damages the global ecosystem, the presence of human beings on the planet should simply be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited. In the context of such extreme visions, the pope does not see other way out than discussion and dialogue, at the same time correctly concluding that there is no single path to solving problems (*LS*, no. 60).

In relation to this issue, any ideological and religious discrepancies need to be rejected, although a believer, as the pope presumes, should well understand that he or she is not an absolute ruler of nature, but

somebody who has been given appropriate tasks in this world by someone greater than them. A way out of the environmental crisis is not, therefore, rupture with God, as it is often suggested nowadays, but just the opposite – becoming even closer to Him and adapting His models of sovereignty over the world (John Paul II, 1979, no. 15). Suggestively formulating this idea, Pope Francis stresses that believers have a new, unique motivation: it becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator (*LS*, no. 64, 93). As the earth existed before us and it has been given to us, then the responsibility to God means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate balance between the creatures of this world (*LS*, no. 67-69).

Thus, an increase in environmental awareness can be also understood as striving to regain world's harmony and to restore the severed link with God. The environmental crisis, as John Paul II stressed, should be therefore seen as a call for deep internal conversion (John Paul II, 2001, no. 4). However, we also need to recognise, as Pope Francis boldly writes, that some Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule the concern for the environment. Others are passive; they are unwilling to change their habits and thus become internally inconsistent, as they lack an *ecological conversion*, associated with developing all the consequences of effects of their encounter with Jesus in their relationships with the world around them. In the spirit of far-reaching humanist radicalism, Francis states that being a protector of God's handiwork is not an optional or a secondary aspect of the Christian experience, but it is an essential part of a virtuous life (*LS*, no. 217).

The pope is pleased with the fact that after a period of irrational confidence in progress and human abilities, at least some parts of society, as he realistically observes, are now entering a stage of deeper awareness and growing sensitivity to the environment (*LS*, no. 19, 42). Remaining a part of nature endowed with freedom and responsibility, humans have the duty to cultivate their potential also in order to protect it (*LS*, no. 71, 78). Heavily criticising, as it was observed above, the technological-economic paradigm, the pope expresses his belief that science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity. Transforming nature has characterised humankind from the beginning, while technology expresses the striving of the human spirit to gradually overcome certain material limitations (*LS*, no. 102-103). Referring to the concerns of some contemporary societies, the pope stresses that nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but it is necessary to slow down the march of technology, to observe the reality, and to search for balance (*LS*, no. 114). If humans, as a part of a mutually interpenetrating whole, are evidently included in the natural environment, it is indispensable today to develop *integral ecology*, encompassing a harmonious unity of all

their relationships: with God, other people, and the Earth (LS, no. 66, 138-141).

Thus, ecological conversion entails first of all a recognition that the world is above all Father's loving gift, and each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us (LS, no. 220-221). A condition for the authenticity of an internal unity with other natural beings also involves tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. Indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world always somehow affects the treatment of other people. Thus, as the pope writes, we also need to see inconsistency in the attitude of those who combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to the problems affecting people, e.g. the poor. If everything is connected, then it is necessary to combine the concern for the environment with a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society. Every pro-environmental project needs to incorporate a social ecology which is based on solidarity and which takes into account the fundamental rights of those most socially underprivileged. Ecology should be associated with the necessity to shape a culture of participation and belonging: from the family, local society, and nation, to international life. Concern for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion (LS, no. 91-95, 142-143, 148, 151, 228).

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the problems of environmental destruction, the depletion of natural resources, and pollution. It should be a distinctive way of looking at things, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality, mostly in families, fostering desirable pro-environmental habits (LS, no. 111, 213). Christian spirituality, as the pope observes, offering perhaps a too idealistic, though desirable vision, should be associated with an alternative understanding of the quality of life, based on contemplation, deep enjoyment, and avoidance of the obsession with consumption (LS, no. 222). Sobriety, lived consciously and freely, is liberating; it is not a lesser, less intensive life – quite the contrary. Those who can experience each moment more fully are those who can enjoy the simplest things, shed unsatisfied needs, and reduce their weariness and anxiety (LS, no. 223-225).

Referring to spirituality as a constitutive factor of integral ecological culture, Frances considers its ethical connotations no less important, and even indispensable (LS, no. 155). The ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems incline, or even force us to search for solutions to problems in this area mainly in a change of humanity. Otherwise humankind would be still dealing merely with symptoms (LS, no. 9, 211). Shaping good relations with nature, which is one and indivisible, must translate

into integral internal renewal of humanity at an individual and social level (LS, no. 118, 218). If humans truly want to recover a harmony with creation, they must, first of all, seriously revise their consumerist lifestyle, which by its nature favours indifference to the resulting harm to nature, but also to other people (LS, no. 218-219, 225). It is only a change in a consumer lifestyle of as large proportions of societies as possible, as soberly concludes Pope Francis, that can lead to revaluing the ways enterprises function and their patterns of production (LS, no. 206).

## 5. Conclusion

The ecological perspective, as John Paul II observes, considerably raises awareness of complex interdependencies within our world, and man asking about the consequences of his lack of harmony with the environment remains the unique being which feels the need to ask questions regarding this issue (John Paul II, 1997, 11). It is hard to disagree with this statement of the Polish pope, as, regardless of how we see ecology – from an anthropocentric, biocentric, or holistic perspective – humans always appear to be the fundamental element of balance in nature. This task is not accidental, as, by their very nature, humans remain a part of their environment, but a part which is rational and free, conscious and responsible. The resources of this awareness and responsibility are verified to a large extent today in the space of the environmental crisis and the development of ecological culture. Searching for guidelines concerning this issue, it is worth considering the following words of R. Ingarden: *Man lives on the border of two different worlds: the world of nature and a specifically human world. He is forced to live on the ground of Nature and within its limits, but thanks to his exceptional being, he must cross its borders* (Ingarden, 1987, p. 17-18). In this deeply synthetic reflection, we can find the entire complexity of the truth about the status of the human as a being which has to incessantly struggle with the question about their place and position within nature. It is something of a paradox that humans cannot build a true, integral ecological culture if they remain irrational beings immersed in nature (LS, no. 58). It is only when they go beyond the limitations of their partially animalistic nature that they are able, as Pope Francis writes, to discover that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us (LS, no. 1).

The vision of integral ecology presented by Pope Francis, though evidently deeply rooted in the Catholic perspective, seems to avoid threats likely to appear in this area. Above all, it appears that it has nothing to do with a kind of religious indoctrination. Formulating his view of ecology, the pope was also able to avoid idealism and abstractionism which are so typical for most theological documents (Czar-

toryski, 2012, p. 50). Reflection on the rational, realistic, but also strongly emotionally charged Pope Francis's proposition of integral ecology should be something evident, especially in the Polish social space, declaring its Catholicism. Undoubtedly, it also deserves attention due to its deeply humanist spirit of concern for nature and the humankind.

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