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## ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY AS A NEW APPROACH TO THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD, MAN, AND NATURE

**Abstract.** An article presents environmental issues of spirituality in their relationship to God, man and the environment on the basis of the encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'*. The Pope took up the current and complicated issue, analysis of which is exposed to various forms of reductionism or ideologies. His view of ecological spirituality is based on the foundation of God the Creator, who gave the world the natural order and also created and shaped the hierarchy of beings. This premise protects against reductionist looking at the man and at the same time—before usurp his absolute power. On this foundation, the Holy Father could develop postulate of the contemplative perception of the world in which he discovers the creatures as objects to use, but above all he sees in them a gift and value given to the man. Such a deep vision can rediscover anew God as Creator and Father for the love of establishing the human world into existence. Thanks to the origin of coming from one Father, Christian sees in others, especially in the weakest and defenceless a brother with whom he has ties of solidarity and love. Finally, the world is seen not as a place of exploitation and prey, but as a mystery that leads to God and God is the full explanation of it. The deeper the mind enlightened by faith contemplates the world, the more he sees beauty and infinity of God. And at the same time more closely connects with God, the more the world reveals to him its beauty and close relationship with the Creator.

**Key words:** the Creator; God; ecology; contemplative style; simplicity; harmony.

### 1. ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

As it was noted, Francis uses the term “ecological spirituality,”<sup>1</sup> making a special reference to ecology. Ecology is a science that studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. It also

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis uses the term “culture of spirituality.” *Laudato Si'* 105. Further abbreviation: LS.

analyzes the development of species and the interrelation of ecosystems (see LS 138).<sup>2</sup> Francis emphasizes that “everything is interconnected” (LS 138) and thus interdependent. In order to avoid dangerous reduction theories regarding the concept of ecology, he mentions the term “integral ecology.” An integral ecology fully captures the riches of the material world, including its environmental, economic, social, and cultural dimension, and everyday life (see LS 138-155). So when he writes about ecology, he always means a holistic view, to avoid extreme positions that distort reality.

Ecological spirituality should be understood in its deepest sense, which excludes a superficial and narrow approach. In order to show its essence, Francis mentions the example of St. Francis of Assisi who embodied it. He was able to live in accordance with an integral ecological spirituality, which made him able to combine all its elements into a coherent program of his life: “He [...] lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself” (LS 10). The fundamental concepts that characterize the subject of this spirituality include the concepts of simplicity and temperance that lead to harmony. Without their proper understanding and application in life, it is not possible to live a real ecological spirituality.

Simplicity is characterized in two aspects that mutually condition and complement each other. The first aspect should be described as negative; it is indirectly implied by the second one which is positive. When Francis recognizes the positive aspect as the ability to stop for a moment in the daily rush, value the world around us and feel gratitude for what we have. In the negative aspect the anti-values are revealed: a constant hurry, devaluation of beings and lack of gratitude. Francis also mentions other negative elements in accordance with the principle of semantic contrast: when he recommends “to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack,” he wants to show the value of freedom and joy. Simplicity is a spiritual attitude that allows us to “stop” and appreciate the small things. Simplicity expands and deepens the perception of the world and human life and allows us to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. (see LS 222).

In attaining simplicity, it is necessary to practice the virtue of sobriety. Francis writes about the principle of sobriety, that is present in different religious traditions. It allows man to find himself and establish his proper relationship with the world. It is about the spiritual acceptance of the paradox: “less is more.” This is not a principle the advocates of which proclaim cheating or the illusion of satis-

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<sup>2</sup> “Ekologia [Ecology],” *Ekologia.pl. Zielono, pozytywnie, nowocześnie!*, accessed 22 November 2016, <http://www.ekologia.pl/wiedza/slovniki/leksykon-ekologii-i-ochrony-srodo-wiska/ekologia>.

faction with lack, but the truth that liberates (cf. LS 223) and leads to joy. In the first place, it is about opposing the degradative attitude of consumerism,<sup>3</sup> which “can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment” (LS 222).

Developing the content of this principle, Francis also opposes the false fear that its acceptance leads to a reduction in the intensity of life and makes it worse (see LS 223). Characterizing people who do not want to change their consumerist attitudes, he says that they are somewhat doomed to constant choice and search for things that they think would satisfy their needs.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, these things have negative consequences, “diminishing” us and makes us unable to perceive higher values (see LS 223). Analyzing the positive aspect of sobriety, Francis argues that thanks to sobriety, the quality of life improves and becomes more intense. Francis justifies his diagnosis by acquiring a deeper insight into the reality of all beings and establishing wider and more lasting interpersonal relationships (see LS 223). The attitude of sobriety means that a person deeply perceives another person and values him more, which results in establishing deeper relationships and spiritual satisfaction. This is expressed in a certain attitude of the heart which is characterized by the ability to be “fully present to someone” and the ability to accept “each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full” (LS 226). Such an attitude is expressed in the realization of spiritual values, which include developing one’s gifts, music and art, contact with nature and prayer (see LS 223) that are deeper than the sensational values associated with the physical and mental spheres.

In ecological spirituality, a contemplative attitude to the world becomes necessary. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis encourages a “contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment [...]”; (LS 222). A “contemplative lifestyle” is an important element of ecological spirituality because, on the one hand, it describes the greatness and potentiality of human nature, and on the other hand, it requires a different view of the created world. If the concept of contemplation is considered in the theoretical sense, as an epistemological process in philosophical terms<sup>5</sup> lead-

<sup>3</sup> Francis uses a detailed definition of such an attitude when he writes about the “obsession with a consumerist lifestyle” (LS 204) and “the obsession with consumption” (LS 222).

<sup>4</sup> This insufficiency of things to satisfy human desires was briefly described by St. Augustine: “if you can, turn unto some pleasure, where you may not feel thorns. Choose what you have wished, whether you are covetous or luxurious; to name these two alone; add a third passion, that of ambition; how great thorns are there in the desire of honours? In the luxury of lusts how great thorns? In the ardour of covetousness how great thorns? What troubles are there in base loves?” SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (Oxford: J. Parker, 2006), 102:9.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jan Andrzej KŁOCZOWSKI, *Kontemplacja. I. W filozofii*, in *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. IX (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2002), col. 748.

ing to the knowledge of the essence of things, their beauty and character (see LS 5),<sup>6</sup> we are dealing with a newness in the present era. It consists in the fact that in the perception of the entire reality we have to switch to other categories, transcending the language of mathematics and biology (see LS 11). This means that the world of nonsensical entities can not be considered only in terms of objects, but should be considered in terms of a certain interdependence that brings good. Creatures should be seen as ordered and we should speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*" (see LS 69).

When the mind is enlightened by the light of God, the contemplative cognition rises to the level of the supernatural cognition. Thanks to the light of God, believers discover the depth and richness of interpersonal relationships. In such a vision, man achieves harmony, which is an expression of spiritual order, influencing on the relationship with God, man and other creatures. Achieving this harmony is a fundamental task of man, because it allows him to achieve fulfillment. At the dawn of the history of mankind there was a kind of unity which, because of sin, became conflictual (see LS 66). It manifests itself not only in the external dimension, expressed in the lack of harmony between nature and man, but it also has an internal dimension.<sup>7</sup> Francis quotes the words of Benedict XVI, who briefly described the drama of the internal conflict and its external effects: "The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast."<sup>8</sup> The settlement of this internal conflict brings harmony to the created world, which is a common home, the space of mutual influence and life links (see LS 225).

<sup>6</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Rome, 1987), no. 34. Some scientists, studying the extremely high level of complexity of matter and its interactions and their ordering, state that super-intellect had to cooperate in the creation of the world. Professor John Lennox from Oxford says that "the more we learn about our universe, the more the hypothesis about the existence of the Creator gains credibility." "Wiedza o wszechświecie prowadzi naukowców do Boga," PCh24.pl. Polonia Christiana, accessed 25 November 2016, <http://www.pch24.pl/wiedza-o-wszechswiecie-prowadzi-naukowcow-do-boga,32997,i.html>. A similar thought line was followed by the Italian nuclear physicist prof. Antonino Zichichi, who stated that there is logic in the world because new laws are constantly being discovered. If there is logic, then its author must exist. Chaos could not be the basis for research. Cf. EKAI, accessed 3 December 2016, [http://nowy.ekai.pl/szuflada/protected/190425/\\_cllbnam9n4-orvglh/#IDAX3AYC](http://nowy.ekai.pl/szuflada/protected/190425/_cllbnam9n4-orvglh/#IDAX3AYC).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mirosława GRUNT, "Pokój wewnętrzny warunkiem pokoju zewnętrznego w świetle wybranych wypowiedzi Jana Pawła II," in *Ku szczęściu – bez oszustwa*, Homo meditans XVIII, ed. Jerzy Misiurek et al. (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1997), 191.

<sup>8</sup> [BENEDICT XVI.] "Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Conferral of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, St. Peter's Square, Sunday, 24 April 2005." The Holy See. Benedict XVI. Homilies. Accessed 15 June 2018. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/\\_documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/_documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html).

Ecological spirituality entails an ecological conversion.<sup>9</sup> It is connected with “a spirituality capable of inspiring us.” Francis indirectly refers to the historical reductionism of spirituality, and thus to the spirituality, which associated the perfection of Christian life with the spiritual aspect, neglecting or even ignoring the whole dimension of the physical sphere of man and the world of visible creatures. Such an attitude might cause detachment from earthly realities and their disregard. That is why Francis points out that “Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities [...]” (LS 216). However, he not only describes the negative aspect, but also provides a general statement that will determine the obligatory involvement of every Christian in the care of the created world: “[we] lived in and with them [wordly realities — author’s note], in communion with all that surrounds us” (LS 216).<sup>10</sup>

Those called to conversion are Christians and people of prayer who, under the pretext of realism and pragmatism, not only do not deal with the natural environment, but also mock caring for them. This attitude is not only irresponsible, but reprehensible and deplorable. Another group does not take such a disrespectful and disrespectful position, but does not contribute to improving the quality of the environment. Francis mentions persons who are passive; they choose not to change their habits whose attitude (see LS 217). This kind of attitude is internally inconsistent, because it accepts a certain type of moral evil, and on the other hand it tries to be close to God, the Eternal Light. A personal encounter with Jesus, which is the foundation of Christian spirituality, has many implications for the natural environment. “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience”(LS 217). True Christian spirituality is impossible without being open to the created world and without showing active concern for it.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. [BENEDICT XVI.] “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2007, The Human Person, The Heart of Peace.” The Holy See. Benedict XVI. Messages. Accessed 15 June 2018. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20061208\\_xl-world-day-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html).

<sup>10</sup> Jerzy Wiesław GOGOLA, *Teologia komunii z Bogiem. Synteza teologii duchowości* [Theology of communion with God. Synthesis of theology of spirituality] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo OO. Karmelitów Bosych, 2012), 217.

<sup>11</sup> Francis presented some trends in Christian spirituality that had a negative impact on the world’s view. The ancient monastic tradition favored escape from the world, from urban decadence in order to seek the presence of God in the desert. The balance between prayer and science and physical work was restored by St. Benedict of Nursia. “Seeing manual labour as spiritually meaningful proved revolutionary. Personal growth and sanctification came to be sought in the interplay of recollection and work. This way of experiencing work makes us more protective and respectful of the environment; it imbues our relationship to the world with a healthy sobriety” (LS 126)

Therefore one must constantly watch over the proper attitude of Christians, who can not be inspired by dislike or even fleeing from the world, but should be its true love.<sup>12</sup> “Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature” (LS 235).

## 2. A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

One of the basic assertions of Francis is the assertion that there is a God who created the world. This biblical assumption has important implications. Entering the dialogue with people of good will who do not share such belief,<sup>13</sup> Francis presents God, who on the one hand defends and protects a man against his self-destructive action, and, on the other hand, defends the world against excessive and sometimes plundering exploitation. Such an imperative comes from the order of the creation of the world. Therefore, the Christian’s commitment to nature results not only from being a human being, but also from a faith that speaks of its creation and redemption. The Christian is obliged to respect the good given to him by the Creator and to care for them (see LS 64).<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the creative act, Francis emphasizes some semantic differences in defining reality using the term “nature” or “creation.” The latter term better suits the plan according to which God called everything to existence. The term “creation” means that the world does not originate from chaos or accident, but from the free decision of the Creator. Thus, it is not a creative act as a result of arbitrary omnipotence, which would be regarded as a manifestation of power or as the will of self-assertion of the Almighty Being. The basic reason for calling everything to existence was the love of God who is goodness without measure (see LS 77). In the light of God’s plan of love, every thing has its value and significance, becoming a gift that comes from the Father. In this semantic spectrum, nature is no longer treated only in terms of the analyzed and managed system (see LS 76), but it becomes a meeting with gift and value.

Not only does the creative act contain the truth about the great value of matter and the whole world, but the truth is further emphasized by the incarnation of the

<sup>12</sup> In the 20th century, the so-called incarnational spirituality is discussed, which is realized not in isolation from the world and its problems, but just as immersed in this world with the light and power of the Holy Trinity. Cf. Charles André BERNARD, *The Nature of Spiritual Theology*, in: Kenneth J. COLLINS, *Exploring Christian spirituality: an ecumenical reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Franciszek mentions two groups of people who believe faith to be an irrational element or a sub-culture that must be tolerated. Cf. LS 62.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Rome 2009), 51.

Son of God. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity accepted all of the material world in its Being, becoming one of the visible beings. In this way, matter has become an element of eternity and divinity. If God has accepted human nature, the material dimension has experienced the greatest exaltation and appreciation. The dignity of the visible world does not end with being incorporated by God, but it is moving towards deification. Because the Incarnate Word of God has transformed matter in the act of resurrection, it means that it will not be destroyed but changed (see LS 235). Christianity appreciates the highest visible world not only because of natural reasons, but above all because of supernatural reasons.

The Eucharist is the act of the greatest honor devoted to God and the moment of showing the importance of the visible world. This importance is shown in the fact that the incarnate Son of God after His death and resurrection wanted to stay with people not only in a spiritual way, but also in a real and substantial one. He “chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours” (LS 236). Francis refers to the structure of the sacraments, which contain an essential material element. It was under the visible signs of wine and bread that Jesus Christ hid His deity and humanity. In this way, the world of matter becomes the necessary mediator in obtaining spiritual gifts. That is why the Eucharist unites the divine and human dimensions and permeates the entire created world. In it, “all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation” (LS 236).

In the perspective of the unification of the sacrament, God appears to be present and penetrating in depth the entire universe. Francis describes the Eucharist as an “act of cosmic love,” because it communicates the presence of God who immanently supports the entire reality in existence. This spiritual horizon gives rise to a desire to worship God who loves the world (see LS 236). By praising God in His works, man can stand only in the act of adoration, which is an expression of accepting Him as the Creator and Lord.<sup>15</sup> Faith in the Triune God allows us to perceive the whole creation at a deeper level, and at the same time to see God's beauty and greatness in creation. “Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.” (LS 237).

On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, was meant to be a time for healing man's relationship

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<sup>15</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church defined adoration as “the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the “King of Glory,” respectful silence in the presence of the “ever greater God.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2628.

with God, with another human being and with creation. Sunday is the announcement of a new era initiated in death, in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, which will find its fulfillment in eschatology. In Parousia, the final transformation of all created reality will take place.<sup>16</sup> Sunday is also a harbinger of man's eternal peace in the Triune God. The ability to celebrate and experience rest is one of the essential elements of this holy day. Francis writes about a "contemplative rest" that does not mean passivity or lack of any activity. Characterizing the contemporary mentality, he points out that the concept of rest is understood pejoratively as something fruitless or unnecessary, because it is devoid of external activity. However, it is the receptive dimension of a man which gives meaning to external acts. "Contemplative rest" becomes a gratuitous act in which the spiritual sphere is revealed in order to fill every human activity with the sense and wisdom of life. Such rest protects a man against empty activism and an uncontrollable and isolated conscience, which sees only a personal interest and strives to achieve its own benefits (see LS 237). Anxious people, unable to rest, experience a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity, makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry, which leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them (see LS 225). Thus, Sunday and the contemplative rest inscribed in it help to live in God's light, which shows the rights of man, especially the poor, and calls for care for nature (see LS 237).

Prayer to God before and after meals is an expression of an insightful look that allows us to know God more deeply in relation to both man and the world. The blessing of food allows the believers to become aware of the fact that they owe everything to the goodness of God. A deep conviction is born spontaneously in the human heart about dependence on the Creator, who is not a tyrant and autocrat, but the best Father who prepares gifts for his children. It also allows us to relive the truth about the concern and work of other people who have prepared and cultivated the fruits of the earth. Finally, it reaffirms our spiritual solidarity with those in greatest need (see LS 227). A short and simple blessing helps to realize the truth about joyful dependence on God, being in His hands and empathizing with the poor.

In the light of previous analyzes, the unambiguous standpoint of Francis, who states that one can not support spirituality that eliminates Almighty God and the Creator, becomes understandable. It seems that for certain groups of Christian ecologists, one can pay such a price for a common position for the protection and promotion of ecology. Francis justifies this unequivocal statement with serious, negative consequences that have harmed and will harm creatures and people when

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2174.



we reject the concept of the Source of Creation. If there is no God, either man will worship earthly powers, or himself usurping the place of God. The best way to bring men and women to their rightful place and take away the prerogatives that have been usurped by them is to speak once more of the true God: Lord and Ruler and Father the Creator. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality (see LS 75). It can be argued that only accepting the existence of God as the Creator and Father fully secures both man and creation against destruction and leads development in the right direction. St. Francis of Assisi is the best example, who initiated a revolutionary view of the created world, because to his time people worked against creation, to bring out food and control the elements from the earth. Since his conversion, an era of openness and sensitivity to nature and its admiration have begun.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH A MAN

As mentioned above, God is central to ecological spirituality, who is the guarantor of the value and order of the created world. He formed a man and placed him in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 2,7-8). This metaphorical description reveals the truth about God's intended order (see LS 221). Under the metaphor of the Garden of Eden, relationships between man and other creatures were described. Only man was given the privilege of being created in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26), which made the Creator want to establish him with a unique being in the visible world.<sup>18</sup> Both John Paul II and Francis are opposed to any reduction, and thus degradation of human dignity to the level of unreasonable beings. Considering man as “simply one being among others” leads to a new disorder (LS 118).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Franco CARDINI, “Frate Francesco, papa Francesco e l’ecologia,” Sanfrancesco. Blog, accessed 28 November 2016, <http://www.sanfrancescopatronoditalia.it/blog-francescani/frate-francesco-papa-francesco-e-l-ecologia--574#.W9W77pNKg5s>.

<sup>18</sup> Francis explains that human beings “also possess a uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by the evolution of other open systems” (LS 81). This thesis should be constantly emphasized, because there are more and more frequent opinions about the lack of a significant difference between man and the animal world. The statement by Dr. Paweł Boguszewski, a neurophysiologist, is symptomatic, who said that “morality, understood as playing according to certain rules, gives us the opportunity to create nations and states. This is what distinguishes us, but I would be careful to draw a categorical line between man and animals.” Paweł BOGUSZEWSKI, “Moralność mózgu. Paweł Boguszewski w rozmowie z Karoliną Głowacką,” *Znak* 2016, no. 10: 24.

<sup>19</sup> Such a vision of man is an anthropological error which John Paul II described it as eco- and biocentrism (in Italian *ecocentrismo e biocentrismo*). [JOHN PAUL II,] “Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Conference on Environment and Health, Monday, 24 March 1997, The Holy See, John

It becomes necessary to rethink and reshuffle the greatness of man in his special abilities of learning, will, freedom and responsibility. This is the necessary human “capital” to allow people to feel responsible for their neighbor and the environment. This also assumes an important truth—without which there is no full anthropology—that man is not the product of chance or physical determinism (see LS 118), but the desire and decision-making act of God who, through love, called him into existence (see LS 65). Denying human uniqueness leads to the weakening of awareness of responsibility in the conscience of the whole world (see LS 118).

The negative effects of “a misguided anthropocentrism” affect not only unreasonable beings but also human beings. When Christianity emphasizes the uniqueness of the human being, it indicates that every person should appreciate another person and remain open. In this way, it confirms the dignity and rights of the human person, treating people with due respect. This existential opening, which is also a moral imperative, should turn into a deep spiritual commitment. While analyzing reality, Francis notices the signs of collective egoism,<sup>20</sup> which results from individual obsessive consumerism. Man becomes selfish and limited to satisfying his own needs. Francis describes this attitude as self-referential. It is semantically broader than consumerism, because it is geared in every field and in

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Paul II, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_1997\\_0324\\_ambiente-salute.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_1997_0324_ambiente-salute.html). Previously, the basis for claiming that human life without features characteristic of it does not have the same value as animal life, was provided by the Australian ethic Peter Singer. He says: “We may legitimately hold that there are some features of certain beings which make their lives more valuable than the lives of some humans. A chimpanzee, dog, or pig, for instance, will have a higher degree of self-awareness and a greater capacity for meaningful relations with others than a severely retarded infant or someone in a state of advanced senility.” Peter SINGER, *Animal liberation: a new ethics for our treatment of animals* (New York: Random House, 1975), 335. Some go a step further and ask questions the answer to which was obvious in previous centuries: Do animals have rights like people? Which rights? Is the human fetus a human? Jacek DUKAJ, “Czy nadejście idei postępu było przejawem postępu?,” *Znak* 2016, no. 10: 9. Some groups present arguments for equality between animals and humans. One example is the former priest, Tomasz Jaeschke, who claims that there is no difference between people and animals. He founded Animal Spiritual Church, in which he blesses animals, which served to call him a pastor of animals (animal pastor). “*Animal pastor. Zrzucił sutannę, by krytykować Kościół i błogosławić zwierzęta*,” PCh24.pl, Polonia Christiana, accessed 2 December 2016, <http://www.pch24.pl/animal-pastor-zrzucil-sutanne-by-krytykowac-kosciol-i-blogoslawic-zwierzeta,45997,i.html>. The raised topic of human and animal rights has launched another area concerning the question about the rights of plants, although the latter is not compared to human beings. Michael Marder, lecturer at the philosophy of the Ikerbasque foundation at the University of Basque Country in Vitoria-Gasteiz, writes about the specific subjectivity of plants, which manifests itself in the sensation of pain and in a kind of intelligence. He postulates the formulation of a possible Universal Declaration of Plant Rights. Cf. Michael Marder, “Czy rośliny powinny mieć prawa?,” *Znak* 2016, no. 6: 6-13.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II wrote about this in *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*, 8.

contact to direct everything to oneself and one's comfort and to take advantage. As a result, man isolates himself in consciousness from people and other beings, increasing his greed. He tries to fill the existential emptiness with various things that he wants to own and consume. These desires obscure the light of God's wisdom, seeing the greatness and uniqueness of another human being. Finally they cause insensitivity to the values associated with the material world.<sup>21</sup> Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle that reflects the self-centredness can "only lead to violence and mutual destruction" (LS 204).

The self-centredness may manifest itself in an even more dangerous effect, which is the kind of self-valorization, which subordinates everything to the free judgment of the self, raised to an arbitrator independent of anything and anyone. Francis says that the implications of this attitude are convenience and relativism. The technocratic model,<sup>22</sup> which considers every achievement as progress and claims to satisfy all human needs, and the desire for unlimited power, develops a human relativism in which both creation and man are as valuable as they serve their own interests. Francis presents it as a logical process in which attitudes are created leading to "environmental degradation and social decay"(LS 122).<sup>23</sup>

The culture of relativism, resulting from the self-centredness, also degrades the other person in his dignity. Francis describes this culture as pathology because it stimulates and leads to the use of another person and treats him as an object. In the perspective of this culture, forcing people to do labor or accepting a man as a slave in exchange for debt is not a surprising act, because it fits in with its logic. Similarly, treating older people who do not serve their own interests or the sexual exploitation of children who are to serve the deviant needs of the adults are the consequence of an irresistible desire to satisfy one's selfish needs. It is not surprising that the environment also suffers damage, for example in the form of trade in

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<sup>21</sup> This is a classic obstacle to spiritual development, which was described by the great Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross. As he claims, one of the damages that lust causes, is blindness and darkness, which in the image of smoke and fog obscures the bright rays of the sun, wishing to illuminate the space. Using this metaphor, the Carmelite mystic adapts it to the spiritual vision of a man who is unable to see the truth about God, man and the material world, remaining in the darkness of ignorance. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I, Chapter 8, No. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Francis uses the term "technocratic paradigm," which is characterized by an objective approach to reality, treating it as completely shapeless and completely accessible to manipulation. The entity is the owner of reality, who can freely transform it. Cf. LS 106.

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II clearly wrote about mutual dependence and conditioning of caring for a man with nature protection. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. As I have already stated, the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself." *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*, 13.

the skins of animals threatened with extinction. This is what Francis describes as the “use and throw away” logic, in which the closure of self prevails (LS 123).

The self-centredness along with the “use and throw away” logic leads to a loss of sensitivity even to the weakest and most innocent. It is about people with disabilities, poor people and human embryos who nowadays are subject to exclusion in various forms. In a special way, Francis refers to conceived human life, stating that “concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion” (LS 120).<sup>24</sup>

Francis concludes that if we do not hear the cry of the weakest, “it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself” (LS 117). Similarly, this matter should be considered at the social level. It is impossible to teach young people the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo (see LS 120).<sup>25</sup> Francis shows a clear contradiction in some ecological movements defending the integrity of the environment, rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, but failing to apply the same principles to human life (see LS 136). This attitude is contrary to integral ecology and ecological spirituality.

Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centredness and self-absorption, respond to these anthropological threats. Instead of being locked in one’s own “ego,” which results in isolation, man can open himself

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<sup>24</sup> In some circles of ecologists, it is recognized that the greatest threat to the planet Earth is man. Because he reproduces at a rapid pace, draws from the limited natural resources of land and is the cause of global warming and pollution, his population should be limited by all possible methods. These groups define man with cancer of the earth. Cf. Agnieszka STELMACH, “Zrównowazony rozwój – ‘walka z rakiem’, którym jest... człowiek,” PCh24.pl, Polonia Christiana, accessed 24 November 2016. <http://www.pch24.pl/zrownowazony-rozwoj---walka-z-rakiem--ktorym-jest---czlowiek,47539,i.html#ixzz4QmdJ6wlj>. Al Gore, former US vice president and winner of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, commented along the same line. In his book *An Inconvenient Truth*, he wrote: “One increasingly prominent group known as Deep Ecologists makes what I believe is the deep mistake of defining our relationship to the earth using the metaphor of disease. According to this story, we humans play the role of pathogens, a kind of virus giving the earth a rash and a fever, threatening the planet’s vital life functions. Deep Ecologists assign our species the role of a global cancer, spreading uncontrollably, metastasizing in our cities and taking for our own nourishment and expansion the resources needed by the planet to maintain its health. Al GORE, *Earth in the Balance: Forging a New Common Purpose* (London: Earthscan, 1992), chapter 12.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI wrote: “When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man’s true good.” BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 28. Cf. IDEM, *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*, 5. See “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2007, *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*, The Holy See, Benedict XVI, Messages, accessed 15 June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20061208\\_xl-world-day-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html)

to others. Only the dynamics of transcending oneself can recognize the value of creatures and enable taking care of all beings. It solves the problem of setting limits to respect the dignity of other creatures and to save them from degradation (see LS 208). The penetration of every being with the light of cognition and supernatural love leads us inevitably to a deep knowledge of the world and to the admiration of creatures. Such activity allows us to spontaneously undertake the task of environmental protection and build good social bonds based on solidarity and mutual respect.

For the formation of ecological spirituality, the right kind of ecological education is needed, which not only regards nature as the subject of research and gains, but also presents it as a mystery. Francis describes the goals of ecological education, from the initial phase in which it was focused on scientific information, raising awareness of ecological danger and preventing it, to modern times, in which it attempts to include criticism of the “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset, and to restore balance of various ecological levels: on the internal level it is about the balance of man with himself, solidarity with all people; on the spiritual level it is about the relationship with God, and on the natural level it is about the bond with all beings. Francis says that an ecological education has a high spiritual goal, which is to help in “making the leap towards the transcendent” (LS 210). The transcendent is an important element of all religions. It deeply justifies the ethical requirements of integral ecology and protects man from self-destruction.<sup>26</sup>

Ecological life was lived by St. Therese of Lisieux, who practiced the little way of love. Everyday small gestures, breaking with the logic of exploitation and consumerism, a kind word and a smile, which sow peace and friendship, are an important element of ecological spirituality (see LS 230).<sup>27</sup> They provide opportunities for a transparent love for people and a desire to enter into their problems in order to help. St. Therese, who discovered the great and free love of God, was

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI undertook the task of justifying ethical norms in his famous speech Faith, Reason and the University, Memories and Reflections. He said: “Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.” “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI, to München, Altötting and Regensburg, (September 9-14, 2006), Meeting With The Representatives of Science, Lecture of the Holy Father, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, Tuesday, 12 September 2006, Faith, Reason and the University, Memories and Reflections.” The Holy See. Benedict XVI. Speeches. Accessed 15 June 2018. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html).

<sup>27</sup> Mother Teresa of Calcutta is also a model of ecological spirituality. For her, the words of Jesus from the cross: ‘I am thirsty’ became an inspiration and motive for bending over the poorest of the poor who were excluded, and over the conceived children threatened with abortion. Her daily ministry and love have inspired many people to change their way of life.

able to love and appreciate the smallest and the poorest, both spiritually and materially. The words of Francis refer to her in a special way when he writes that “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. the authenticity of a sense of internal unification with other beings of nature is simultaneous tenderness, compassion and concern for man” (LS 91).

#### 4. A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

Ecological spirituality assumes not only a proper reference to God and to man, but also to other creatures. There is a false anthropocentrism according to which man owns the world (see LS 64, 223). Man uses his dominance over creatures in a ruthless manner and makes a plussive exploitation of global resources.<sup>28</sup> John Paul II emphasized that the environment often fell prey (*la preda*) to the interests of a few strong industrial groups.<sup>29</sup> Francis noted that “to till too much, to keep too little, is to sin.”<sup>30</sup> To characterize this attitude, he refers to a Promethean vision of mastery over the world (see LS 116). This vision was attempted to be realized especially during the technical revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when nature appeared to be a prey. Such a way of incoherent and destructive behavior is the result of the sin committed by man at the beginning of his history, which was defined as original sin (see LS 66).<sup>31</sup>

In the state of innocence, the first parents were to pass on life, rule over creatures and subdue the earth (see Genesis 1:28). According to the wisdom of biblical description, tilling referred to: cultivating, ploughing or working, and

<sup>28</sup> Francis also uses other pejorative terms that speak of human depravity and intellectual blindness. He calls “for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures” (LS 83). Cf. “Apokalipsa już się rozpoczęła. René Girard w rozmowie z redakcją czasopisma ‘Réforme’,” *Znak* 2016, no. 11: 59.

<sup>29</sup> “Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Conference on Environment and Health, Monday, 24 March 1997, The Holy See, John Paul II, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_1997\\_0324\\_ambiente-salute.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_1997_0324_ambiente-salute.html).

<sup>30</sup> “Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Consistory Hall, Monday, 28 November 2016,” The Holy See, Francis, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161128\\_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161128_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, The Holy See, John Paul II, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html).

keeping was explained as caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. In this perspective, a man appears rather as a caretaker and a caring manager, than an absolute owner of the world (see LS 67).<sup>32</sup> Hence, ecological involvement is not just a simple concern for the surrounding world of animate and inanimate beings and for the atmosphere, but a moral project that is related to God and to another human being (see LS 210,219).<sup>33</sup>

An opposite extreme view of man as an absolute ruler is the idea of exalting the earth until its deification.<sup>34</sup> Francis does not define the essence of this phenomenon, but rather defines its symptoms. The symptoms manifest themselves in the lack of maintaining the proper hierarchy of beings, in which man was made equal in dignity with other creatures. The consequence of this erroneous assumption is that some environmentalists defend endangered species of animals and plants more than the equal dignity of humans (see LS 90) and fight against ill-treatment of animals, failing to notice the humiliation of the poor and the slave trade (see LS 91). Hence Francis emphasizes that the rediscovery of the visible world “can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings [...]” (LS 78).

To keep the balance of positions, Francis wrote about the demythologizing of nature by the Judaeo-Christian religion on the one hand, and, about its splendor

<sup>32</sup> Looking for justification for such proceedings, Francis stated that “We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (LS 2). This statement accuses Christians who in some periods of history have distorted God’s thought. Cf. “Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Consistory Hall, Monday, 28 November 2016,” The Holy See, Francis, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161128\\_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161128_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html). See Marianne HAMBACH-STEINS, “Ein Impuls zur ‘ökologischen Umkehr’ — Die Umwelt — und Sozialenzyklika *Laudato si’*,” in ZENTRUM FÜR INTERDISZIPLINÄRE NACHHALTIGKEITSFORSCHUNG (ZIN), *Ganzheitliche Ökologie*. *Diskussionsbeiträge zur Enzyklika Laudato si’ von Papst Franziskus* (Münster: ZIN, 2015), 5; Franco CARDINI, “Frate Francesco, papa Francesco e l’ecologia,” Sanfrancesco. Blog, accessed 28 November 2016, <http://www.sanfrancescopatronoditalia.it/blog-francescani/frate-francesco-papa-francesco-e-l-ecologia--574#.W9W77pNKg5s>.

<sup>33</sup> “Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Participants in the Study Week Organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (18 May 1990),” The Holy See, John Paul II, Speeches, accessed 15 June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19900518\\_acc-scienze.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19900518_acc-scienze.html). Por. JAN PAWEŁ II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Rome, 1987), 34. In this context, the German Bishops’ Conference wrote not to use creatures as much as to keep solidarity with them. Cf. DEUTSCHE BISCHÖFSKONFERENZ, *Schöpfung Zukunft der Schöpfung — Zukunft der Menschheit. Erklärung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zu Fragen der Umwelt und der Energieversorgung*, Bonn 1980, available at <https://www.nachhaltigkeit.info/media/1294745787.phpxOOD7y.pdf>, 5.

<sup>34</sup> The term “divinization of the earth” (Italian *la divinizzazione della terra*) is used by Francis only once in *Laudato Si’* (no. 90).

and admiring beauty, on the other hand (see LS 78). In this perspective, neither man nor the world can take the place of God because they would usurp the undue prerogatives, which would have devastating consequences. Secondly, man in the world must read the plan of God who inscribed him in the order of nature. Thirdly, by reading and expressing the world, man expresses and affirms himself (see LS 85).

To read the beauty of the world, a contemplative attitude is needed. The world is a “great book” in which one can decipher something of the beauty and goodness of God. In the great book of nature, every creature is like a letter of the alphabet, contributing to a description of its Author. The Canadian bishops have stated that creation is not beyond God’s revelation, but through the richness of its forms it is a constant source of wonder and honor. The contemplation of creation allows us to claim that apart from the revelation in a strict sense there is God’s revelation contained in the world. In this sense, creation is a mysterious message for man, which he should hear and understand (see LS 85).

The contemplative gaze reveals the diversity of relationships and the multiplicity and diversity of beings. They are not isolated and closed lives, but are connected by a network of connections necessary for life and development. This immense diversity and harmony testify to the greatness and goodness of God. The greatness of God manifests itself in a great number of creatures and their diversity, and goodness—in calling them to existence and establishing order and harmony between them (see LS 86).<sup>35</sup>

The world not only in its external form and order testifies to the Creator, but this testimony is contained in deeper layers. As Francis writes, “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love [...]” (LS 84). This does not mean only the fact of creating it out of love for existence, but also the truth that all beings are marked by the love of God and are its carriers and “reflect something of God” (LS 221). Such a claim is justified by the fact that God the Father is the ultimate and loving foundation of all things, the Son took this world in Himself with the incarnation, and the Holy Spirit, the infinite bond of love that “is intimately present” at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways (cf. LS 238). This trinitarian outline of creation was described by St. Bonaventure, who was convinced that “each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile” (LS 239).

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<sup>35</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “the beauty of the universe: the order and harmony of the created world results from the diversity of beings and from the relationships which exist among them. [...] the beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 341.



Such an insight into reality is experienced by mystics, whom the world, in its manifestations of beauty and harmony, transfers directly to God. They experience a dual epistemological path: the creatures directly connect them with God (the upward movement), and at the same time they discover the beauty of the world in God (the downward movement) most fully. St. John of the Cross, to whom Francis refers, wrote that the good and beauty of things “is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God.”<sup>36</sup> This thought is dangerously close to the pantheistic theory in which God is identified with the material world. St. John never meant to deny the Divine transcendence, but to express the inner bond that exists between God and the creatures, so that the person “feels that all things are God [...]”<sup>37</sup> Francis notices that in this mystical experience there is a direct transition from the knowledge of the beauty of the world to the knowledge of the perfect attributes of God (see LS 234). Such purified “eyes” of the human intellect, enlightened by faith, can see God in the smallest manifestations of the world: in a leaf, in a dewdrop and in a poor person's face (see LS 233).<sup>38</sup>

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In conclusion, it should be stated that ecological spirituality, according to the thought of Pope Francis, allows a new approach to the relationship to God, man and nature. Ecological spirituality is characterized by the rejection of all forms of reductionism, and the turning to the knowledge of reality by the mind enlightened by faith. Its fundamental features include simplicity and sobriety, which through conscious self-limitation can enjoy every creature and object. On this way, the Christian creates harmony with God and creatures. This spirituality allows us to see God again as Father the Creator, who out of love called the whole world into existence and has been caring for it. Father the Creator protects a man from usurping the absolute ownership of the world and using it (self-centredness), and consequently destroying himself, his neighbor and material beings. Man discov-

<sup>36</sup> JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Cántico Espiritual*, XIV, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Cf. Sławomir ZALEWSKI, *Bóg a pełnia człowieka. Rozwój życia mistycznego chrześcijanina w dynamicznym procesie oczyszczeń według św. Jana od Krzyża* [God and the fullness of man. The development of the mystical Christian's life in the dynamic process of purifications according to Saint John of the Cross] (Płock: Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy, 2015), 301–3.

<sup>38</sup> In his speech to the participants of the International Catholic Rural Association, Francis even spoke of fatherly “love” towards nature. He quoted a conversation with a farmer who pruned olive trees “as if he was their father, with love.” “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting of the International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA), Consistory Hall, Saturday, 10 December 2016.” The Holy See. Francis. Speeches. Accessed 15 June 2018. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161210\\_rinione-icra.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/december/documents/papa-francesco_20161210_rinione-icra.html).

ers, through faith in God, the greatness and dignity of his neighbors, coming to them in the attitude of openness and love (disinterested concern for others). Finally, he re-establishes relations with non-rational beings in the sense that he does not treat them only as objects of use or perceive only the external order, but directs a contemplative look to their being in which he discovers the action of the Triune God. The world becomes a mystery to him, which is a call to discover the greatest Mystery — God.

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