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## How can Ecological ethics assist in the progress of man?

*Towards a reflection on the Encyclical letter Laudato si'*

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**Abstract:** Our living-space is in such a crisis, that its solution cannot be resolved by technical tools but firstly and mainly by changing a human's mind towards his surroundings. Also environmental polluting as the one of the seven modern mortal sins rises from pride and from lack of humility. Because of globalisation, this modern sin became a world-wide problem. Concerning this, ethics has a clear objective: the state along with the economy has to care for ecology, also in the international criteria. Better air, sea, woods should be valued more than higher luxury in dressing, eating, living or tourism. Some moralists say that particularly because of the loss of theological sense for creation ecological problems have emerged. And the biblical message is that man is the *oeconomus* (provider) of the Earth and not its absolute owner. At this point, we must realise that the environment is a continuation of human's corporality and so it must concern his love towards himself and towards his fellow. The man does not identify only with himself, but also with his home (*oikos* – house, habitation). Ruthlessness towards nature excludes authentic love. Love includes solidarity with everything that lives and undoubtedly it includes also considering the future generations too. Despite the lockdown due to the Covid-19 coronavirus, the issue of the environment and the need for systemic change in society and the individual is once again at the forefront of political discussion. Even the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council actively participated in changing man's thinking about nature. The current Pope Francis 7 years ago published a serious appeal to world society in his Encyclical letter *Laudato si'*. Later, in his traditional Sunday address to the faithful, he first announced a time of reconsidering the Encyclical letter. For this reason, we will try to make a few suggestions in our proposal.

**Key Words:** Environmental ethics, Ecology, Theological ethics, Relationship man – nature, Common House, Common Good, Responsibility for future generations, the new style of life, the Changing of thinking.

The 20th century revealed the two-way relationship between man himself and the natural habitat and the importance of technology in this relationship. Bidirectionality man-environment shows us that the technique that in past centuries had served essentially to protect us in nature and to ensure the survival of the human species, has recently brought about changes of such magnitude, that it has profoundly upset the world sometimes in a negative way. Professor Sgreccia say, that the Progress, pursued in order to obtain better and better living conditions, has paradoxically led to opposite results, leading to such radical changes in the natural environment that it has led to conditions that are

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sometimes dangerous to health and pose the problem of the survival of the entire human species.<sup>1</sup>

#### *A small historical introduction*

A fundamental contribution to the understanding of this reality has been made by term *ecology*. This term was introduced by the German biologist and naturalist Ernest Haeckel in 1866 to indicate the "study of the relations between organisms and their environment". In recent decades, ecology has highlighted the fact that the focus of environmental problems has been on natural habitat management that has not been set correctly according to rationality criteria. In 1969 the United States proclaimed the environment as a new central problem of humanity (R. Nixon) and in 1974 American philosopher William Blackstone taught about Philosophy and the Environmental Crisis. In 1979 came a first Centre for Environmental Philosophy at the University of North Texas (Environmental Ethics). The cultural context of the development of Environmental Philosophy was the emergence of bioethics, understood as a new form of reflection on scientific and technological progress. With the advent of the post-industrial technological society, bioethics has set itself as the discipline that must contribute to make humanity's life and health compatible with the cultural product that man himself built.<sup>2</sup>

We know that Catholic Environmental Ethics affirms the need for an anthropocentric point of view, since it is necessary to have man as a reference point if we want to establish an environmental ethic really capable of proposing operational solutions.<sup>3</sup> The recovery of balance with nature is not achieved by equating man with other living beings, but rather by changing his way of thinking and acting towards other natural entities and placing himself in a perspective of responsibility towards the Creator as well as towards future generations. There is a graduation in the importance of the various entities of nature that also affects the moral value to be attributed to them. It will be up to man alone, by virtue of his position in the environment, to recognize the moral importance of other creatures.

After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI repeatedly expressed concern about the environment in the context of real human progress, and here for the first time the phrase "revival of ecological conscience" appears in his Message on the UN 1972.<sup>4</sup> In The international conference about Environment in the same year he said: "Man and his environment are inseparable. All technical measures remain ineffective unless accompanied by an awareness of the need for

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<sup>1</sup> Elio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica. Volume II. Aspetti medico-sociali*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2011, p. 707.

<sup>2</sup> Elio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica. Volume II. Aspetti medico-sociali*, p. 708.

<sup>3</sup> Elio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica. Volume II. Aspetti medico-sociali*, p. 726.

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, „Le preoccupazioni ecologiche e le esigenze del reale sviluppo“, in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1972, p. 606-611.

a radical load of mentality ... according to the requirements of true ethics.”<sup>5</sup> It is in this combination of man and his change of behaviour that theology has a broad field of application, as we will see in Pope Francis' most recent documents.

Another very important theological point of view notes that because nature does not originate from man, but from the Creator, it cannot be managed in a despotic way. For that reason is very significant a question: at what point can a modification of nature be considered legitimate? Sgreccia notes that man, once he has satisfied the primary necessities inherent in his own survival, has the right to improve his living conditions as long as he always takes into account the intrinsic limits of nature itself. Man must overcome the temptation of omnipotence (deriving from the vast apparatus of technical-scientific knowledge) in order to avoid the risk of being destroyed by what he himself has discovered or invented. Modification to natural reality must be remembered that they will only be lawful if they bring benefits to present generations and do not harm the future one.<sup>6</sup>

The successor of Paul VI, John Paul II, also worked very actively on this change of mentality. In his address to the United Nations on 18 August 1985, he pointed out that environmental programmes to ensure food and shelter are concrete ways of *promoting peace*. As far as the man-creator relationship is concerned, he says that the peaceful use of space promotes the unification of the human family and that only an attitude of respect can correct the damage caused to the environment. And he repeated in the Message for a World Day for Peace in 1990 entitled *The peace with God Creator*. The peace with all created from 8 December 1989 that we need a change of mentality and customs: "Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it *takes a serious look at its lifestyle...* *An education in ecological responsibility* is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth"<sup>7</sup> and further "the environment, animate and inanimate, has *a decisive influence on man's health*."<sup>8</sup>

Also in the new millennium, the Roman Catholic Church is extremely urgent with regard to the environment. For example, among modern sins appointed by Archbishop Gianfranco Girotti for the daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* is also *environmental pollution*, in particular the release of poisons into

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<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, „Le preoccupazioni ecologiche e le esigenze del reale sviluppo“, in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1972, p. 608.

<sup>6</sup> Elio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica. Volume II. Aspetti medico-sociali*, p. 727.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace”, Vatican, 1990, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html), art. 13.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Conference on Environment and Health”, Monday, 24 March 1997, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19970324\\_ambiente-salute.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970324_ambiente-salute.html), art. 1.

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nature.<sup>9</sup> This sin also derives in reality from pride and lack of humility. Because of globalization, this "modern sin" is also becoming a global problem. Even in this area it seems that only a truly well-formed conscience of the individual will be able to resist the idea that nature must also obey the laws of the market.

And finally on May 17, 2020, the Holy Father Francis at *Regina Coeli* announced the week dedicated to *Laudato si'*<sup>10</sup> which ended on following Sunday, commemorating the fifth anniversary of the publication of his Encyclical letter about Environment. Then from May 24, many initiatives will mark a year dedicated to the care of the common house.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, the interdicasterial table of the Holy See presented on 31 May 2020 a document on integral ecology, five years after the publication of *Laudato si'* called *The Path to the Care of the Common House*: "In this difficult time, which will be destined to change the societies in which we live - the reference to the pandemic in progress - we are called to take care of one another, not to close ourselves off in selfishness, to promote and defend human life from its emergence to its natural completion, to offer adequate medical care for all, to foster international solidarity, to combat the culture of waste, to study, to build together new, more equitable economic and financial systems, to commit ourselves to dialogue, peace, and the rejection of violence and war".<sup>12</sup> So we can see on the part of the Roman Catholic Church a fundamental effort to conduct a dialogue, to maintain peace and to form a new lifestyle.

*Perspectives of important theologians for a relationship between ecology and economy*

Therefore, how we can see, many theologians repeat that man's living space on our globe today is in such a crisis, that it cannot be managed by technical

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<sup>9</sup> Nicola Gori, "Le nuove forme del peccato sociale (*The new forms of social sin*. A conversation with the Regent of the Penitentiary at the conclusion of the course for confessors)", *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 9, 2008, 8, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.webdiocesi.chiesacattolica.it/cc\\_i\\_new/documenti\\_diocesi/218/2008-03/10-28/Rassegna%20stampa%2010%20marzo%202008.html](http://www.webdiocesi.chiesacattolica.it/cc_i_new/documenti_diocesi/218/2008-03/10-28/Rassegna%20stampa%2010%20marzo%202008.html).

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>11</sup> Debora Donnini, "Anno Speciale dedicato alla Laudato si'. Il Papa: più forza alla cura del Creato," (*Special Year dedicated to Laudate si'. Pope: more strength to the care of Creation*), accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2020-05/anno-anniversario-speciale-laudato-si.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Tavolo interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sull'ecologia integrale, *In cammino per la cura della Casa Comune. A cinque anni dalla Laudato si'. Celebrazione del V Anniversario dell'Enciclica Laudato si'* (Citta di Vaticano: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2020), art. 6, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.olir.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/In-cammino-per-la-cura-della-casa-comune.pdf> and see also Bollettino, Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, *Resignations and Appointment*, 18.6.2020, accessed November 10, 2022, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/18/200618a.html>.

means, but first *by changing man's mentality towards his surroundings*.<sup>13</sup> This statement calls us to repentance. In a broader sense, the social property of all of us is the whole world as the living space of all humanity for the preservation of the life of creation from the beginning, that is, from the birth of life as such. Peschke defines this crisis as a waste and carefree use of natural resources and at the same time a burden on nature (this may include the pollution of water, air and soil, excessive interference with nature of animals and plants). To this we could add recycling and waste problems which Pope Francis calls the throwaway culture (e.g. the increase in technology and the rapid replacement of devices, which again result in heavy metal waste above the permitted limit, etc.).<sup>14</sup> Despite these transgressions, however, attention needs to be paid to so-called *ecological resources*, which make basic foodstuffs more expensive and even more poverty and hunger in the world (for example, the problem of rapeseed fuel production has made many foods more expensive in the world). Fitte adds that ecology refers to the good management of the environment, the home and the environment of all human beings.<sup>15</sup> This is an important part of consumer ethics.<sup>16</sup> But the relationship between ecology and economy is very topical today and is a rivalry between economic efforts and ecological considerations. Ethics has a clear objective: in addition to the economy, the state must also pay attention to ecology, including on an international scale (clean energy sources). Moral education also includes a preference for products that are less affordable but less harmful to the environment. Better air, sea and forests are more precious than more luxury in clothing, food, housing or tourism.<sup>17</sup> According to Fitte, exactly the loss of a sense for *the theology of creation* causes ecological problems.<sup>18</sup>

To the criticisms of the consumer society we need to note that not only can a person in capitalism be alienated, but also a person who seeks only pleasure. A person who only cares about pleasure cannot be free. As John Paul II pointed out, obedience to the truth allows man to organize his desires and how to satisfy them in the right hierarchy, so *property becomes a means of growth for him*.<sup>19</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> Jíří Skoblík, *Přehled křesťanské etiky*, Praha, Karolinum, 1997, p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 16. For example, also the increase in technology and the rapid replacement of devices, which only involve waste above the permitted limit of heavy metals, etc., see Pavel Baroch, „Kde končí zlato z mobilních telefonů? Na skládkách,“ *Aktuálně.cz*, April 13, 2008, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/kde-konci-zlato-z-mobilnich-telefonu-na-skladkach/r~i:article:601340/>.

<sup>15</sup> Hernán Fitte, *Teológia a spoločnosť. Prvky sociálnej morálnej teológie*, Bratislava, Lúč, 2007, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Hospodářství z křesťanského pohledu*, Praha, Česká křesťanská akademie, 1996, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Bernhard Sutor, *Politická etika*, Praha, Oikoumene, 1996, p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Hernán Fitte, *Teológia a spoločnosť. Prvky sociálnej morálnej teológie*, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus*, 01. 05. 1991, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html), art. 41.

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it is not the desire for a better life that is wrong, but a way that pretends (man) to be better when he prefers to "have" over "to be."<sup>20</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* on this subject, adds that love for the truth reminds us that we cannot understand the human community if we do not recognize that it is more than the sum of its material parts if we do not understand man's capacity to sin and anchor the whole community in the gift of God's grace. Therefore, morality and justice are not without morals and just people. At the same time, Benedict shows that economic science has great benefits for the good of man.

The entire fourth chapter of the *Caritas in Veritate* encyclical deals with the rights and obligations in the development of nations, with particular regard to environmental issues. The Pope points out that individual human rights, if relieved of their corresponding duties, can "go mad" and create a "spiral of conditions that lose their boundaries and deviate from all criteria."<sup>21</sup> At this point, Benedict calls for morally responsible responsibility for life as a social and economic good. In order for the market to be humanized, the Pope emeritus supports the variability of both profit and non-profit-oriented institutional forms (this also applies to environmental protection). Finally, Benedict supports the responsible treatment of nature, which is only possible on the basis of a holistic view of nature, which protects people from self-destruction: "Nature is not available to us (St. John Paul II), but it is a gift from the Creator who gave it internal rules."<sup>22</sup> And he repeats after the teaching of his predecessor that peace in the world therefore also has an ecological dimension. Environmental ecology and human ecology appear as two sides of the same coin. "If nature and especially man are seen as the fruits of chance or evolutionary determinism, the awareness of responsibility in consciousness will become increasingly weaker. On the contrary, the believer recognizes in nature the miraculous work of God's creative intervention, which man can use responsibly."<sup>23</sup>

#### *Causes of the problems of the biblical message in the environmental crisis*

Skoblík significantly points out the modern and frequent remorse for the mistaken view of the Judeo-Christian tradition with a strong (unique) anthropological thinking as the cause of the current environmental crisis.<sup>24</sup> Strong anthropocentric man subjugates animals and plants. He has no respectful relationship with them and all he needs is just to use them. Truly in contrast to the Hindu or Indian tradition, Holy Scripture dedicates less love to animals and

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<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus*, art. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html), art. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Jiří Skoblík, *Přehled křesťanské etiky*, p. 239-240.

subhuman life. After strong criticism of White<sup>25</sup>, who claimed that the Bible was responsible for man's domination of nature, several theologians vehemently opposed this argument. The defence was based on the fact that in Genesis we have two traditions. In addition to Gen 1: 26-28, there is also a Yahweh version, where man is the custodian of the garden. And from the origins of the Church there have been theological components that have proclaimed respect for creation as a *Gift from God*, especially from St. Francis of Assisi and his followers.<sup>26</sup>

However, the problems of animal rights and animal care are already occupied by St. Thomas Aquinas in the chapter on cruelty, which passes from the treatment of the animal to the human sphere.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Peschke points out from a bioethical point of view that if we have a conflict of interests, the animal is not human and although it suffers, it must be sacrificed for research and food rather than the human embryo. And this moralist also indicates biblical reverence for creation. He accentuates that Saint Paul proceeds from the point of view that he considers the imperfections and sufferings of nature the consequences of human sin (Rom 8:18-24). Fitte also argues that the biblical message indicates man as a creature among other creatures. According to this message, man is the administrator of the earth and not the absolute owner.<sup>28</sup>

Pope John Paul II says very significantly that: "As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question-ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to 'human ecology' properly speaking (*Centesimus annus*, 38) - which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact, 'the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to use and misuse', or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 34)."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science* 155, 1967, p. 1203-1207.

<sup>26</sup> Elio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica. Volume II. Aspetti medico-sociali*, p. 729.

<sup>27</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II 102, 8, 6, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2102.htm>, cf. Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 659.

<sup>28</sup> Hernán Fitte, *Teológia a spoločnosť. Prvky sociálnej morálnej teológie*, p. 119. The relationship between man and nature in the Czech environment is analysed in depth by Josef Petr Ondok, *Člověk v přírodě. Hledání etického vztahu*, Kostelní Vydří, Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Evangelium vitae*, accessed November 10, 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html), art. 42.

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Nevertheless, the real emphasis on creation is brought only by Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato si'*. Not only did Pope Francis invent new ideas on the subject, but his urgent style and way of leading the Church led to the Church today being at the forefront of changing the mindset of society and the individual as a result of the union of ecology and theology. But also science that claims to offer solutions to major issues should necessarily take into account everything that knowledge has produced in other areas of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics.<sup>30</sup> Here Francis affirms then other creatures must be respected for their values in themselves and not just for utilitarian reasons.<sup>31</sup>

The environment is an extension of the human body and must therefore relate to his love for itself and his neighbour. Man identifies not only with himself but also with *his home*. Peschke adds that recklessness towards nature precludes true charity. This Charity also includes solidarity with all that lives, but also respect for future generations. In this way, the environment has become a real problem through the development of science, technology and the industrialization of society. However, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that, as in the very ancient past, nature was heavily burdened (e.g. deforestation and deforestation). This has only accelerated today with the help of the scientific and technical revolution.<sup>32</sup>

However, Skoblík summarises that the adoption of the ancient study of nature by medieval man has already strained biblical tradition. This research has led to an exact knowledge of objects and their mastery. In the Enlightenment, when the natural sciences became independent of theology, there was a one-sided image of man as a machine, which is governed by physical laws. Therefore, it was believed that with the help of the natural sciences and technology, it was possible to manage problems of health, happiness and success in life. At the same time, industrialization begins, in which also Skoblík sees the beginning of today's crisis.<sup>33</sup>

The individual stages of this process are also the secularization of the 18th century, the French Revolution, technical thinking and the ideal of knowledge formulated by modern natural sciences. The irony of this crisis, according to German moralist Alfons Auer, is the fact that since the Enlightenment, Christianity has been criticized for not trusting the natural sciences and for hindering the progress to which the natural sciences are contributing. The Church, of course, had reservations about the specific form of the natural sciences (with a weakness for materialistic and mechanistic notions), where there was no room for God and the Christian faith.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 33, cf. Dermot A. Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue. The Wisdom of Laudato si'*, Dublin, Messenger Publications, 2020, p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 642.

<sup>33</sup> Jiří Skoblík, *Přehled křesťanské etiky*, p. 239.

<sup>34</sup> Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 644, cf. Alfons Auer, *Umweltethik*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1989, p. 206..



*The modern human and integral development from the point of view of the Social doctrine of the Church*

Skoblík analyses the causes of the environmental crisis (including the 1970s) as follows: growing industrialization, population growth and human malnutrition, limited nature of raw material reserves and destruction of the environment. The Prague moralist emphasizes that it is not the task of the Church to give instructions to overcome this crisis, but Church can to work in the field of education, that is:<sup>35</sup>

- drawing attention to the gravity of the situation (the kingdom of God begins here in this world).

- seek a theological-sociological solution: instead of performance, thought and mentality of exploitation towards nature, more attention should be paid to *the expression of love for creation*, joy of nature, respect for an inferior form of life and the search for a lifestyle in nature. This will eliminate practical materialism and appreciate spiritual values that do not harm nature and do not burden future generations. From the point of view of today's message of Pope Francis especially in *Laudato si'*, these proposals sound almost prophetic.

Also Peschke's basic guidelines for nature are similar: love of nature, respect for nature, moderation and self-restraint.<sup>36</sup> Although, despite these ideas, attention should be paid to ecological resources that make basic foods more expensive and world poverty and hunger even greater,<sup>37</sup> we must not forget as Christians the biblical vision that creation was born through the Word and not the result of materialistic determinism, so it is the work of Divine Intelligence endowed with infinite wisdom, imagination, beauty and goodness.<sup>38</sup>

Saint John Paul II affirms that in relation to nature we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones.<sup>39</sup> And Pope Francis adds that the technique separated from ethics will hardly be able to limit its own power.<sup>40</sup> And John Paul II, as Pope Francis today, speaks of the connection of the ecological question with consumerism, whose roots lie in anthropological error.<sup>41</sup> However, there are

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<sup>35</sup> Jiří Skoblík, *Přehled křesťanské etiky*, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 649 - 50.

<sup>37</sup> REPORT CTK (Czech Press Office), "Vědci EU doporučili pozastavit biopaliva, komisař je podporuje" (EU scientists have recommended the suspension of biofuels, the Commissioner supports them), *Journal Novinky*, April 13, 2008, accessed November 10, 2022, <http://www.novinky.cz/clanek/137511-vedci-eu-doporucili-pozastavit-biopaliva-komisar-je-podporuje.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 647.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 30 December 1987, accessed November 10, 2022,

[http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html), art. 34. It is interesting to note at this point Peschke's comment on negativity and denial, i.e. man's contribution to the extinction of certain animal species, cf. Karl-Heinz Peschke, *Křesťanská etika*, p. 648.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 136.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus*, art. 37-38.

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both material and spiritual aspects of ecology (here the Pope speaks of protecting the conditions for "human ecology").<sup>42</sup> Today, the term climate change is very lively and discussed (and frightened). For this reason, the term Social Doctrine of the Church "integral development" is often referred to in the German-speaking world as "Nachhaltigkeit".<sup>43</sup> The term development (progress) in *Caritas in Veritate* has a positive meaning, because it helps a person in an attitude of trust in their own abilities and in the abilities of others. With the help of these skills, it is possible to seek the good in freedom and responsibility and achieve it step by step. Globalization therefore does not become a simple destiny, but a concrete task.<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI stresses that the development of humanity (and, we add the emphasis on the protection of nature) is only possible if the human person is taken into account in all its dimensions. The truth in development derives only from its integrity: "if development does not concern the whole person and all persons, then it is not true development".<sup>45</sup> However, this development will only happen in practice if it is based on the responsible freedom of individuals and nations: "No structure can guarantee this development if it leaves human responsibility aside."<sup>46</sup> And finally he also writes that nature is the admirable work of the creator for a non-instrumental and arbitrary use.<sup>47</sup>

Speaking about anthropological error, Pope Francis says that Criticism of deviant anthropocentrism should not even overshadow the value of relationships between people. If the ecological crisis is an emergence or an external manifestation of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot delude ourselves that we are restoring our relationship with nature and the environment *without restoring all fundamental human relationships*. When Christian thought claims a particular value for the human being above other creatures, it gives space to the appreciation of every human person, and thus stimulates the recognition of the other.<sup>48</sup> In this way, human ecology is transformed into integral development.

Another very important factor is the relationship between integral development and Common good. Pope Francis teaches that Integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of Common good, a principle that plays a central and unifying role in social ethics.<sup>49</sup> This option requires drawing the consequences of

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<sup>42</sup> Hernán Fitte, *Teología a sociedad. Prvky sociálnej morálnej teológie*, p. 121.

<sup>43</sup> On this subject, attention should be drawn to the document of the German Bishops' Conference, the Commission for Social and Social Affairs and the Commission for the World Church no. 29, September 2006, *Der Klimawandel: Brennpunkt globaler, intergenerationeller und ökologischer Gerechtigkeit*, Bonn, DBK, 2007, accessed November 10, 2022, [https://www.dbk.de/presse/aktuelles/meldung/?tx\\_news\\_pi1\[news\]=1326](https://www.dbk.de/presse/aktuelles/meldung/?tx_news_pi1[news]=1326).

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 29; 34; 36.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 119.

<sup>49</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 156.

the common destination of the goods of the earth, but he demands that we first of all contemplate the immense dignity of the poor in the light of the deepest convictions of faith. It is enough to observe reality to understand that today this option is *a fundamental ethical requirement for the effective realization of the common good*.<sup>50</sup> For poor countries, the priorities must be the eradication of poverty and the social development of their inhabitants; at the same time they must examine the scandalous level of consumption of certain privileged sectors of their population and combat corruption more effectively. Of course, they must also develop fewer polluting forms of energy production, but for this they need to count on the help of countries that have grown a lot at the expense of the current pollution of the planet. The direct exploitation of abundant solar energy requires that mechanisms and subsidies be established so that developing countries can have access to technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources, but always paying attention to concrete conditions, since "the compatibility of plants with the context for which they are designed is not always adequately assessed". Costs would be low when compared to the risk of climate change. In any case, it is above all an ethical decision, based on the solidarity of all peoples.<sup>51</sup>

However, it is not enough that everyone is better to solve a situation as complex as the one facing the world today. Individuals can lose the ability and freedom to overcome the logic of instrumental reason and end up succumbing to a consumerism without ethics and without social and environmental sense. Social problems are responded to with *community networks*, not with the mere sum of individual goods. The ecological conversion that is required to create dynamism of lasting change is also *a communal conversion*.<sup>52</sup> And Francis adds that we need to feel again that we need each other, that we have a responsibility to each other and to the world that it is worth being good and honest. Already for too long we have been in moral degradation, making fun of ethics, goodness, faith, honesty, and the time has come to recognize that this cheerful superficiality has served us little. This destruction of every foundation of social life ends up by pitting us against each other in order to defend our own interests, provokes the emergence of new forms of violence and cruelty and prevents the development of a true culture of caring for the environment.<sup>53</sup>

### *Conclusion or new beginning?*

To this human ecology and Integral development we add that the main gap in environmental protection between environmentalists is the effort to save nature by focusing only *on itself*. However, in the real and effective protection of the environment, it is necessary to focus not on the material but on man and his vocation and God, as Pope Benedict said, who wanted to connect man with his

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 158.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 172.

<sup>52</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 219.

<sup>53</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 229.

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creation.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, says our current pontiff Pope Francis, a superficial or apparent ecology is growing which consolidates a certain numbness and carefree irresponsibility. Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the problems that arise regarding environmental degradation, the depletion of nature reserves and pollution.<sup>55</sup> And Francis adds that it should be a different look, a thought, a policy, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality that give form to a resistance in the face of the advancing technocratic paradigm.<sup>56</sup>

That is why we think it is the reference to a true human ecology that is the way to dialogue with those who, in protecting the ecology of nature, are perpetrating damage to creation and its future. But one cannot prescind from humanity. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology and new lifestyle.<sup>57</sup>

We can conclude that, since Christians assume that creation was born through the Word and not the result of materialistic determinism, it is a work of divine intelligence endowed with infinite wisdom, imagination, beauty and goodness. However, in order to restore the destroyed balance of nature, we need not less, as some say, but more reasons. We must recognize nature in its value and take man's responsibility in this process particularly seriously.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, we must put pressure on the powerful of this world to take to heart the protection of the environment that enables us to begin to live the kingdom of God in this world. And only human ecology together with Integral development can protect nature. This integral development consists of solidarity in the field of biopolitics, human work and peace as a sign of justice and love. And of course Integral human development at personal, community and global level requires an essential prerequisite: the defence and promotion of human rights.<sup>59</sup>

Nowadays, human ecology opposes the pessimistic and catastrophic ecological ideologies that elevate nature above man. And while their supporters claim to want to protect the environment, they are destroying human ecology. There is not only an ecosystem, man also has his "nature" and even social relationships, especially family relationships, have a certain nature that must be respected. When the environment is damaged, it means that something has already been damaged in human ecology, in the functioning of social relations. Every wound in human ecology causes damage to the environment.

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<sup>54</sup>Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate*, art. 29.

<sup>55</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 59.

<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 111.

<sup>57</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 118; 16; 22; 231; 57; 188.

<sup>58</sup> Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Ethik des Lebens. Grundlagen und neue Herausforderungen*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 2009, p. 152.

<sup>59</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si'*, art. 157.

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