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### Catholic Anthropology from an Ecological Perspective: Pastoral Study in the Light of the Encyclical *Laudato si'*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** One of the important causes of the ecological crisis is the egoistic mentality of contemporary people and the lack of respect for the natural order and immanent purpose of the creation. In order to shape a new pro-ecological consciousness a new concept of man and his relations with the environment is needed. One of the proposals is Catholic anthropology, whose ecological foundations were indicated by Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato si'*. It is a proposal to describe man applying religious concepts, but also including the up-to-date knowledge about man and the environment. It is a concept open to dialogue, the aim of which should be the development of a pro-ecological lifestyle for contemporary people. Catholic anthropology postulates to combine “external” ecology with “moral” ecology, which can help modern man not only to have control over nature, but also to become its defender through small, everyday activities. In ecologically oriented anthropology, the created world is treated as a common home, and Pope Francis calls it our sister, with whom we share existence, and a beautiful mother, who takes us in her arms.

**Keywords:** Catholic anthropology; ecology; man; creation; relations

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Anthropology, as an interdisciplinary field of knowledge, uses the humanities, social and natural sciences. As the term itself indicates: it is the science of man as one, the only, unique “person.” Christian religion also has its own perspective of man, and its

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anthropology uses the achievements of theology, philosophy and religiology. Catholic anthropology, on the other hand, is a separate academic discipline, whose basic source of truth about man is the revelation and the Magisterium of the Church.

The starting point in Catholic anthropology is the thesis that it is necessary first to get to know God who revealed himself in the Person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,<sup>2</sup> to gain knowledge about man. Such knowledge is possible within the framework of theology, which no one can practice “as it were a simple collection of his own personal ideas, but everyone must be aware of being in close union with the mission of teaching truth for which the Church is responsible.”<sup>3</sup> Catholic anthropology, therefore, is characterized by ecclesiality, that is, fidelity to the tradition of the People of God with all its richness and multiplicity of knowledge and cultures united by a unity of faith.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the contemporary civilization progress, the development of science and the ubiquity of modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, an important question arises: how should Catholic anthropology develop today? John Paul II, analyzing the situation of believers, in his post-synodal exhortation “*Ecclesia in Europa*,” stressed that today “In many social settings it is easier to be identified as an agnostic than a believer. The impression is given that unbelief is self-explanatory, whereas belief needs a sort of social legitimization which is neither obvious nor taken for granted.”<sup>5</sup> And Benedict XVI, speaking as the retired Pope, confirmed the validity of these statements, as he said in his “Final Conversations”: “The fact that we no longer fit in with contemporary culture and that Christian patterns are no longer a decisive indication

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<sup>2</sup> See: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis* (24 May 1990), No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), No. 19, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (28 June 2003), No. 7, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20030628\\_ecclesia-in-europa.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html).

is obvious. We are now living within a positivist and agnostic morality that is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christianity. Therefore, Western society, Europe in any case, will simply not be Christian.”<sup>6</sup>

In the face of such dangers contemporary Catholics need a new Catholic anthropology, in which they will find a comprehensible answer to the centuries-old questions about the meaning of life and death, about the dignity of the human person and, above all, about the meaning of faith in God the Creator and Saviour. The answers of reason only arouse a desire for ever broader and deeper knowledge, so different systems of thought have emerged, which have resulted in the development of many fields of knowledge serving the advancement of civilization and culture. The history of mankind shows that the whole area of knowledge has been subject to this process, affecting primarily anthropology, logic, natural sciences, history and language. Scientific progress directed only by reason towards the search for knowledge about man as a subject has marginalized the importance of man’s main vocation, which is the pursuit of the truth that exceeds himself. Without reference to a truth directed towards transcendence, every man is dependent on the arbitrariness of human judgment, and his existence as a person is evaluated only according to pragmatic criteria subordinate to the technology, and the origin of those is found in experimental knowledge. As a result of this process, reason is increasingly burdened with extensive knowledge and loses the ability to point attention towards transcendence. Modern philosophy focuses on the limitations of man instead of using his ability to know the truth.<sup>7</sup>

This danger of reaching false conclusions also threatens anthropological research. Therefore, Catholic anthropology assumes that faith requires an intellectual foundation, and therefore, by its very nature, seeks to gain knowledge in order to reveal to man the truth about his destiny and the way to achieve it. The main task of the anthropologist, therefore, is to acquire, in conjunction with the Teaching Office of the Church, an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God contained in the inspired Scriptures and transmitted by

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ostatnie rozmowy*, Kraków 2016, 269.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio* (14 September 1998), No. 5.

the living Tradition of the Church. If, on the other hand, verbal expression of the revealed truth exceeds human capabilities and the concepts one uses are imperfect in the face of its unfathomable greatness, it is, however, an invitation for reason, the tool given by God for approaching truth, to enter into its Light to understand what one has believed in. Catholic anthropology, like theology, is, therefore, a science which, responding to the call of truth, seeks to understand faith.<sup>8</sup>

Catholic faith therefore requires support from Catholic anthropology. This is all the more necessary because, in contemporary society, human concepts are created that wander off from the truth oriented towards transcendence, in the conviction that the primacy of man is thus confirmed, in the name of his right to freedom as well as full and free development. In this way, these ideologies deprive man of his constitutive dimension as a person created in the image and likeness of God. This serious mutilation is today a real threat to man, since it leads to perceive him without any reference to transcendence.<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, considering these threats to the human person as an important challenge also for the environmental protection, placed in the encyclical “*Laudato si*” new ecological impulses for the modernization of Catholic anthropology. His teaching focuses once more anthropological research on the search for the place of the human being within creation and on defining the resulting consequences.

## 1. Catholic and “Modern” Anthropocentrism

According to Catholic anthropocentrism, similarly to all creation, man, who is included in evolutionary processes, brings with him a certain novelty that cannot be explained by evolution and other open systems. Every man has and represents a personal identity, capable of entering into relationship and dialogue with God himself

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis*, No. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Council for Culture on the Occasion of Their Plenary Assembly, (19 November 1999), No. 2, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont\\_messages/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19991119\\_plenary-pc-culture.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont_messages/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19991119_plenary-pc-culture.html).

and with other persons. Man's capacity for reflection, reasoning, creativity, interpretation, artistic creation and other original possibilities show his uniqueness, which goes beyond the physical and biological area of life. The qualitative novelty constituted by the creation of a personal being within the material universe, presupposes the direct action of God who, creating man, makes it possible for him and calls him at the same time to establish personal relationships. Catholic anthropology, viewed from an ecological perspective, based on the Bible, the Tradition and the Magisterium, thus recognizes the human person as a subject that can never be reduced to the category of an object.<sup>10</sup>

The subjectivity of the human person directs the person towards other people with whom he has various relationships. This also applies to his relationship with all creation. For this reason, in Catholic anthropology, the ecological crisis is treated as an external manifestation of problems related to respect for human dignity, as well as the widely understood ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity. Consequently, Catholic anthropologists claim that it is impossible to heal the relationship between man and nature as well as the natural environment without recognizing the dignity of every human person and healing all fundamental human relationships. This means that man's openness to the other "you," which enables him to know, to love and to enter into dialogue, defines more precisely man's great nobility. This nobility enables him to have a proper relationship with the created reality while preserving the social dimension of the human being, as well as its transcendent dimension, its openness to God's "You." Thus, in the ecological concept of Catholic anthropology, it is emphasized that man's relationship with God as well as with other people is decisive for the quality of his relationship with the environment. According to Francis, questioning this truth leads to a romantic individualism hidden under the mask of ecological beauty and a suffocating confinement in immanence.<sup>11</sup>

In opposition to Catholic anthropology, we can observe today an anthropology based on modern anthropocentrism, which has led to

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), No. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 119.

placing technological factors above man. The reason for this state of affairs is that man no longer sees nature “as the norm that is always valid, let alone as a shelter in his life. He looks at it without any ready-made assumptions, treating it as an object, place and material of his creativity, devoting everything to it, not caring about its outcome.”<sup>12</sup> In this way the value that the world has in itself is weakened. This is fraught with consequences. For if man does not discover his true place, he also fails to understand himself properly, which leads to denying his own nature. Therefore, Catholic anthropology assumes the principle that “[n]ot only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”<sup>13</sup>

Modern anthropology’s rejection of the relationship between man and God leads to a false anthropocentrism which threatens, above all, man himself, disturbs his sense of community and makes futile attempts to strengthen social bonds and relationships. For this reason, Catholic anthropology pays particular attention to a somewhat oxymoronic observation that the limitations of earthly reality can at the same time provide opportunities for a more healthy and fruitful human and social development for the individual man. Inadequate presentation of these basic assumptions of Catholic anthropology has led in ecological concepts to the promotion of a misconception about human relationship with the world. As a result, a Promethean dream of domination over the world appeared in modern anthropology, which gave the impression that concern for nature is a matter that concerns weak people.<sup>14</sup>

Catholic anthropology is in clear opposition to modern anthropology, primarily on the plane of ideological dispute. The

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<sup>12</sup> R. Guardini, *Koniec czasów nowożytnych. Świat i osoba. Wolność, łaska, los*, Kraków 1969, 53.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991), No. 38, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 116. A correct interpretation of man as the “lord” of the universe is to understand him in the sense of a “responsible steward.”

point is that many contemporary anthropologists are subject to a kind of technocratic exaltation that undermines the special value of the human person. Therefore, Catholic anthropologists stress that humanity must be valued first and foremost, because without accepting the unconditional dignity of the human person, a new relationship with nature cannot be established. So, there is no true ecology without proper anthropology. When the human person is considered as merely one more being among others, as if resulting from a game of chance or a physical determinism, there is a danger that the awareness of responsibility will be weakened in conscience: “whenever nature, and human beings in particular, are seen merely as products of chance or an evolutionary determinism, our overall sense of responsibility wanes.”<sup>15</sup>

Exchanging the modern anthropocentrism for a “biocentrism” would also be a false solution, as it would mean adding a new disorder, which will not only fail to solve the problems related to the human person and its place in the creation, but will bring about new ones. So the ecologically-directed Catholic anthropology emphasizes that man cannot be required to be involved in the world if one does not simultaneously acknowledge and stress his relationship with God, who is the source of special cognitive capabilities as well as freedom and responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

The second important area of confrontation between Catholic anthropology and contemporary anthropocentrism is man’s attitude to the progress of civilization. In modern anthropology, the false assumption is made that progress is an increase in power giving more security, benefit, prosperity, more life force, full measure of values. Experience shows, however, that modern man has not been brought up to be able to use his power properly,<sup>17</sup> because the enormous technological growth is not accompanied by the development of the human being in an ethical and moral dimension,

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<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (8 December 2009), No. 2, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliiii-world-day-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html) (access 25 March 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Guardini, *Koniec czasów nowożytnych. Świat i osoba. Wolność, łaska, los*, Kraków 1969, 68.

especially with regard to responsibility, respect for values and a properly functioning conscience. Contrary to the assumptions of modern anthropology, reality, goodness, truth and beauty are not a spontaneous outcome of the very power of technology and economy. For this reason, it is possible today that humanity does not see the seriousness of the challenges that arise before it, and there is an ever-increasing possibility that man will misuse his power when it is not “subject to the binding norms regulating freedom, but only to the seemingly necessary norms, namely, those of benefit and securing one’s future.”<sup>18</sup>

An important anthropological issue is also to define more precisely the personal dignity of man as a conscious and free being, but not fully autonomous. Catholic anthropologists are fully aware that today human freedom is endangered most of all. It is distorted when it is entrusted to the blind forces of the subconscious, to immediate needs, to selfishness and to brutal violence. In this sense, it is threatened and vulnerable in the face of its own power, which is constantly growing, without the proper tools to control it. Catholic anthropology, therefore, emphasizes that man can have superficial mechanisms at his disposal, but at the same time needs a sufficiently solid ethic, culture and spirituality that would truly limit and keep him in check.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Relationships in Man’s Natural Environment

In Catholic anthropology, viewed from an ecological perspective, a very important element is the historical reality of time and space, which determines human life in the natural environment. In this time and space, three basic human relationships develop and function, closely connected with each other: with God, with other people and with creation. According to the Bible, because of sin, these three essential relationships have been ruptured not only externally, but have also been disrupted within man himself. The harmony between the Creator, mankind and all creation was destroyed because man attempted to take the place of God (false

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–8.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 105.



anthropocentrism), refusing to recognize himself as a limited creature. For this reason, it is significant that the harmony with all creatures, lived out by St. Francis of Assisi, was interpreted as the healing of this rupture.<sup>20</sup>

The example of St. Francis shows that when the heart is truly open to universal communion and to creating relationships, nothing and no one is excluded from this fraternity. Therefore, it is true that indifference or cruelty to other creatures of this world always translates in some way into the way we treat other people. There is one heart, so the same “spiritual poverty” that leads to animal abuse will inevitably manifest itself in relationships with other people.<sup>21</sup> No man can consider himself a truly loving person if he excludes a part of reality from his interests. Everything is interconnected and therefore all people are united as brothers and sisters in a wonderful pilgrimage, united by the love that God bestows on each of his creatures and that connects each person also with his brother Sun and Moon, sister river and mother Earth.<sup>22</sup>

Love for the whole universe, with its diverse relationships, should have its source in the love of God, whose inexhaustible richness is shown by creation. According to St. Thomas, the multitude and distinction of creation is the work of the first Creator, God, who wished that “what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another,” because his goodness “cannot be represented fittingly by any one creature.”<sup>23</sup> The condition for discovering the richness of creation is, therefore, to capture the diversity of things in their multiple relationships.<sup>24</sup> The full understanding of the meaning and sense of each creature, therefore, requires the recognition of the entire creative and salvific plan of God.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Any kind of cruelty towards any creation is contrary to human dignity. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2418.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 92.

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 47, art. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 47, art. 2, ad. 1; art. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 86. “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the

### 3. The Role of Relationships in the Cognition of Man and the World

At the source of the rational cognition of man and the world there are fundamental questions: “Who is man and what is his meaning? What is his good and what is his evil?”<sup>26</sup> (Sir 18:8). These questions express man’s need to find the meaning of his existence both at its essential and decisive stages and in the most ordinary moments. These questions also stimulate human reason and will to seek a solution that could give life its full meaning. The search for answers to these questions requires a comprehensive study of the “cause of things,” since it is then that human reason reaches its peak and opens itself to religion. Religiousness, on the other hand, is the most sublime expression of the human person, since it is the summit of his rational nature. It is derived from man’s deep quest for truth and is the foundation of free and personal search for Divinity.<sup>27</sup>

The cognition of man and the world can have a purely rational dimension, but for a full understanding of their sense and meaning for man and his existence, faith is also necessary. The search for truth is not only done in an individual struggle in a library or laboratory, but also has a communal, relational dimension. Man is perfected not only by the acquisition of theoretical knowledge of the truth, but also by a living relationship with the other person, which is expressed by the gift of oneself and by the fidelity that enables him to give himself as a gift. Thanks to this, man finds full confidence in the truth and safety in life. The rational knowledge of truth should therefore be founded on faith, which is based on trust between persons: by believing, man puts faith in the truth which the other person shows him.<sup>28</sup> The fullness of truth is thus achieved through others, in dialogue with others and for others. The search

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sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 340.

<sup>26</sup> NRSV translation.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John Paul II, General audience 19 X 1983, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1983/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19831019.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1983/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19831019.html).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, No. 32.

for truth and sharing it with others is an important social service to which the people of science, especially those professing the Christian faith, are especially called.<sup>29</sup>

#### A. The Holy Trinity and the relationships between creatures

The Holy Trinity is the model of all relations in which man functions. The Divine Persons are self-existing relationships, and the world created in God's image is a network of relationships. Creatures are directed towards God, and it is a feature of all living beings to strive for another creature, so that in the universe one can find countless, enduring relationships that intertwine.<sup>30</sup> One of the important tasks of Catholic anthropology, therefore, should be to learn the relationships and the many links existing between creatures in order to seek and discover the key to integral human development. The human person can develop, mature and be sanctified by entering into relationships, thus exceeding himself in order to live in communion with God, with other persons and with all creatures. In this way, the believer accepts in his life the Trinitarian dynamic that God has imprinted in him since the beginning of his existence. Everything in creation is interconnected, so this establishment of ever new relationships leads man to mature in a spirituality of global solidarity which emanates from the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>31</sup>

#### B. Man's relationship with the creation

Nature is often treated by modern anthropologists only as a system that is learned, analyzed and managed. Catholic anthropologists, on the other hand, using the teaching of the Bible, treat "creation" as nature closely related to God's loving plan, in which every being has value and meaning. Creation, therefore, can

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address to the heads of universities in Poland [*Przemówienie do rektorów wyższych uczelni w Polsce*], Toruń 7 June 1999, No. 5, [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan\\_pawel\\_ii/podroze/pl-19990607\\_jp\\_uczelnie.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/podroze/pl-19990607_jp_uczelnie.html) (access: 25 March 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 11, art. 3; q. 21, art. 1, ad 3; q. 47, art. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 240.

only be fully understood as a gift from a loving Father, as a reality filled with love, calling every man to universal communion and to create relationships with other people.<sup>32</sup>

Catholic anthropology, first of all thanks to the teaching of the Bible, as well as the scientific achievements it uses, is free from the constantly repeated attempts to mythologize nature. Without ceasing to admire it for its splendour and immensity, it does not attribute a divine character to it. In this way, the duties of man, a rational and free being, towards the whole of creation are emphasized even more. The return to nature, however, must not take place at the cost of the limitation of consciousness, freedom and responsibility of man, who is part of the world and has the duty to develop his skills in order to protect the world and develop his potential. If believers recognize the value and fragility of nature, at the same time respecting the abilities given to them by the Creator, they can put an end today to the modern myth of unlimited material progress, which in effect destroys the balance of the ecosystem and, as a result, threatens man himself. The fragile world including man, who is called by God to rule in it, therefore poses a new challenge to human intelligence, but also to faith, so that believers can redirect, shape and limit their power over creation.<sup>33</sup>

The aforementioned demythologization of nature in the Christian vision of creation gives believers an effective defence against idolatry, that is, worshiping the world powers, and also provides arguments against the falsely understood anthropocentrism of modern anthropology. Thanks to the faith in God the Creator, the Christian is put in his right place and does not strive to be the absolute ruler of the earth. The lack of faith in God the Creator leads, on the other hand, to man wanting again and again to impose his laws over the reality and egoistically pursue his own interests.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, No. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, No. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, No. 75.

### C. Christians' relationship with other people

Catholic anthropology, whose source is the Revelation, Tradition, and the Magisterium, shows Christians the possibility of participating in the realization of God's "providential" plans for all humanity. It is not only a matter of individual commitment, much less individualistic, as if development were possible through isolated efforts of everyone. True development requires the commitment of all and everyone, especially members of the Catholic Church. Cooperation for the development of the whole person and of each one is, in fact, a duty of all towards all, and should also be universal in the various "worlds." If, on the other hand, one tries to realize development in one part only or in "one world," it is done at the expense of others. The same is true if development begins without taking into account the rights of others, which leads to overgrowth and its distortion. For this reason, individual peoples and nations have the right to their own full development, which, including economic and social aspects, should also take into account their cultural identity and openness to transcendent reality. The Magisterium also emphasizes that the need for development cannot be treated as a pretext for imposing one's own way of life (ideologized totalitarianism) or one's own religious faith (proselytism) on others.<sup>35</sup>

## 4. True, Integral Anthropocentrism

In the concept of integral Catholic anthropology with ecological elements, a new style of Christian life should be developed in accordance with the laws of nature. Contemporary Catholics are threatened by the practical relativism characteristic for the present age, which is "even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism."<sup>36</sup> When a human being puts himself at the centre, he ultimately gives absolute priority to what is convenient in the short term, and all the rest becomes relative. The reason for relativism is the omnipresence of the technocratic paradigm and the worship of unlimited human

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987), No. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Francis, Encyclical *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), No. 80.

power. There is a certain logic in this, which makes it possible to show how different attitudes reinforce each other, simultaneously causing degradation of the natural and social environment.<sup>37</sup>

According to J. Ratzinger, relativism is a derivative of absolute pluralism based on secular ideology, which attempts to remove Christianity from the consciousness of modern people. In his view, there are attempts to limit religion to the private sphere, and then Christians start to think that Christianity is just one of many voices and therefore they should not introduce their personal beliefs into the political scene either. This phenomenon occurs today in the United States as well as in Western Europe. The relativization of truth leads to a kind of schizophrenia. For example, Catholic politicians, who privately want to be faithful Catholics, when speaking in public, are convinced that they should not transfer their personal beliefs to the public sphere, explaining this by the need to observe pluralism.<sup>38</sup>

The culture of relativism, promoted by modern anthropology, leads to various social pathologies, such as forced labour, slavery for debt, abandonment of the elderly, and sexual abuse of children. Relativism in social life also leads to an aberrant understanding of the invisible power of the free market, which is supposed to regulate the economy even at the price of its harmful effects on society and nature. Pope Francis therefore poses a concrete question: If there are no objective truths or fixed rules, except for satisfying one's own aspirations and immediate needs, what restrictions can there be for human trafficking, criminal organizations, drug smuggling, the trafficking of "blood diamonds" or the skins of animals in danger of extinction? It is relativistic logic that justifies the trade in organs of poor people in order to sell them or use them for research, and is responsible for rejecting children because they do not meet their parents' wishes. The logic of relativism is also the source of a commonly applied principle: "use and throw away," which

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Chrześcijaństwo jest drogą, którą winniśmy podążać także pod prąd!* Z kard. Josephem Ratzingerem, przewodniczącym Kongregacji Nauki Wiary, rozmawiali: Marek Lehnert, Bogumił Łoziński, Marcin Przeciszewski (KAI – July 2004). <http://niedziela.pl/artykul/1491/Chrzescijanstwo-jest-droga-ktora-winnismy> (access: 8 July 2017).

generates a lot of waste only because of an unordered desire to consume more than is actually needed. Catholic anthropology therefore rejects the thesis that political programs or the power of law are sufficient to prevent environmentally harmful behaviour, because when a culture is depraved and no objective truth or universally applicable rules are recognized anymore, laws will be understood only as arbitrarily imposed and as obstacles to be avoided.<sup>39</sup>

### **5. Christian Life in Accordance With the Laws of Nature and the Truths of Faith**

Catholic anthropology takes advantage of the achievements of modern scientific research. However, Catholic anthropologists are aware that empirical sciences alone, without faith, will not fully explain life, the essence of all creatures and the entire reality. This is impossible because of purely methodological reasons. If research and scientific reflection takes place in this closed area, then aesthetic sensitivity, poetry, and the ability of reason to see the meaning and purpose of things disappear.<sup>40</sup> In Catholic anthropology, revelation and the Magisterium are the primary source. Pope Francis notes that classical religious texts can offer meaning for all epochs, as they have a motivating force that always opens new horizons. So a legitimate question arises: is it rational and reasonable to remove them into the dark just because they were created in the context of religious faith?<sup>41</sup> In fact, it is naive to think that ethical

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Lumen fidei*, No. 34: "Nor is the light of faith, joined to the truth of love, extraneous to the material world, for love is always lived out in body and spirit; the light of faith is an incarnate light radiating from the luminous life of Jesus. It also illumines the material world, trusts its inherent order and knows that it calls us to an ever widening path of harmony and understanding. The gaze of science thus benefits from faith: faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. Faith awakens the critical sense by preventing research from being satisfied with its own formulae and helps it to realize that nature is always greater. By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation."

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, No. 256.

principles can be presented in a purely abstract way, detached from any context, and the fact that they appear in religious language does not take away any value from them in the public debate. The ethical principles that reason is able to perceive can always return in different aspects and be expressed in different languages, including religious language.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, every technical solution developed by science will be powerless in the face of the serious problems of the world if mankind loses its direction, if one forgets the great motivations enabling coexistence, dedication and kindness. Therefore, Catholic anthropology places great emphasis on the activity of believers in order to live according to their faith and not to deny it by their actions. In their activity, they should open themselves to God's grace and draw more deeply from what, in their deepest beliefs, concerns love, justice and peace. Historical problems may be a certain hindrance to this, when a misunderstanding of the Gospel principles sometimes led Christians to justify abusive treatment of nature or man's despotic control over creation as well as wars, injustice and violence. In the face of these manifestations of a departure from the Truth, Christians, as believers, should recognize that they were thus unfaithful to the treasure of wisdom. Very often the reason for this disrespect for the Truth was the cultural limitations of different epochs, which conditioned the awareness of their respective ethical and spiritual heritage, so it is precisely a return to the sources that allows religions to respond better to current needs.<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to the development of ecologically oriented Catholic anthropology, the ecological awareness of the human environment increases. In the rightly undertaken ecological activities, the concern for preserving the natural habitat of various animal species threatened with extinction according to the principle that each of them contributes to the overall balance of the earth began to manifest itself more clearly. Catholic anthropologists, however, point out that it is man who is the most important and that greater importance should be attached to protecting the moral conditions of true human ecology. "Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, No. 199.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, No. 200.



with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed."<sup>44</sup>

### Final Remarks

In today's world, very profound changes are taking place, and solving the global challenges facing the human family in the new millennium demands that Catholic anthropology and the social teaching of the Church be taken into account, including the ecological dimension. In the contemporary world, it is up to Catholics to take common and coordinated action to make true, value-based democracy a reality for the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>45</sup>

Ecologically inclined Catholic anthropology today is not just a new concept for the integral description of man as a thinking, free, believing person, befriended with nature, but it is a historical necessity to defend man from the greatest threat that he is himself. The imposition of a false anthropology without Christ on contemporary people has led to man's being considered the absolute centre of reality. This type of thinking has taken root in modern anthropology and, against the nature of things, has made man take the place of God, forgetting that it is not man who creates God, but God who creates man. Forgetting about God led to the abandonment of man and therefore, in this context, a vast space was opened for the free development of nihilism in the field of philosophy, relativism in the field of the theory of cognition and morality, pragmatism and even cynical hedonism in the structure of everyday life.<sup>46</sup> The new concept of ecologically inclined Catholic anthropology creates an opportunity to take action to defend the human being, whose constant goal remains to head towards the encounter with the Risen Christ and achieve a happy eternal life.

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<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, No. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message to the Participants in the Sixth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (23 February 2000), No. 14, [http://vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000223\\_acd-sciences-plenary.html](http://vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000223_acd-sciences-plenary.html) (access: 25 March 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 9.

The contemporary Church in its Catholic anthropology turns to man, whom God created and saved because of love. This thought is the centre of Catholic anthropology, which today must be constantly developed to become the foundation of a new culture.<sup>47</sup> The new Catholic anthropology should take into account the richness and values of the cultures of today's people and sow Christian values in them.<sup>48</sup> Polish Catholics can play a very important role in this area, as J. Ratzinger pointed out. "In Poland, there is still a very strong common identification with Christianity, as one of the foundations of the nation's identity. Christian values – certainly not without inner resistance – remain a guarantee of the identity of Polish society, of an awareness of human dignity, in a word, a force that opens up the future. [...] The Holy Father, when he was still the Archbishop of Kraków – we read about it in his last book – was very concerned about forming the intelligentsia with a strong faith and about its presence on the intellectual and social level. This seems to me to be very important for Europe, and especially for Poland: to develop a philosophical thought, and one that engages in a dialogue with the demands of our times, with the whole empirical reality that surrounds us. It is necessary not only to notice the correspondence between faith and the contemporary vision of the world, but also to show that the contemporary Church and the world needs well-formed Catholic intellectuals. I do not know exactly the problems of the Polish pastoral ministry, but it is important that Polish Catholicism, so strong in the life of faith, should also have that intellectual strength which engages in dialogue with all currents of contemporary thought. I would like this Polish Catholicism, characterized not only by the strength of faith but also by the strength of intellect, to be able to play an important role outside Poland, in the European context."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, No. 59.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Council for Culture on the Occasion of Their Plenary Assembly *Christian humanism*, No. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Chrześcijaństwo jest drogą, którą winniśmy podążać także pod prąd!* Z kard. Josephem Ratzingerem, przewodniczącym Kongregacji Nauki Wiary, rozmawiali: Marek Lehnert, Bogumił Łoziński, Marcin Przeciszewski (KAI – July 2004). <http://niedziela.pl/artykul/1491/Chrzescijanstwo-jest-droga-ktora-winnismy> (access: 8 July 2017).

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