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Ecology and Justice: From *Environmental Justice* to *Integral Ecology* of «*Laudato si'*»

Ekologia a sprawiedliwość. Od *Environmental Justice* do *ekologii integralnej* «*Laudato si'*»

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Abstract: Until recently, in the social teaching of the Church, the principle of social justice has been primarily related to poverty, social inequalities, wealth distribution, and goods. Pope Francis extends this understanding to environmental issues. While diagnosing and describing the contemporary ecological crisis (our inability to resolve it in particular), he identifies the same mindset and mechanisms underlying both the social and ecological crises. Therefore, Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* is a revolutionary text based on integral ecology that reintroduces justice (similarly to *Rerum Novarum* over 130 years ago) as the key to addressing a new social issue – the contemporary ecological crisis. The comprehensive perspective on the contemporary global crisis as a socio-ecological crisis, in *Laudato si'*, finds its reference in the developed concept of *Environmental Justice* as a new type of social justice. The viewpoint of a moral theologian allows us to perceive the duties associated with it not only as a legal obligation (*debitum iuridicum*) but also more deeply as a moral obligation (*debitum morale*).

Keywords: ecology, integral ecology, justice, environmental justice, *Laudato si'*, ecological crisis, Catholic social teaching, religion and ecology

Abstrakt: Do tej pory w nauczaniu społecznym Kościoła zasada sprawiedliwości społecznej odnoszona była przede wszystkim do kwestii ubóstwa, nierówności społecznych, dystrybucji bogactwa czy dóbr. Papież Franciszek odnosi ją do kwestii ekologicznej. Diagnozując i opisując współczesny kryzys ekologiczny, a przede wszystkim niezdolność do jego rozwiązania, dostrzegł u podstaw zarówno kryzysu społecznego, jak i kryzysu ekologicznego tę samą logikę i te same mechanizmy. To wszystko sprawia, że na encyklikę *Laudato si'* trzeba patrzeć jako na tekst rewolucyjny, który na kanwie ekologii integralnej proponuje na nowo – analogicznie jak miało to miejsce przed ponad 130 laty w encyklice *Rerum novarum* – sprawiedliwość jako klucz do rozwiązania nowej kwestii społecznej, którą stał się współczesny kryzys ekologiczny. To charakterystyczne dla encykliki *Laudato si'* całościowe patrzyenie na współczesny kryzys globalny jako kryzys społeczno-ekologiczny ma swoją odniesienie w wypracowanym na gruncie teorii prawa pojęciu *Environmental Justice* – sprawiedliwości ekologicznej jako nowego rodzaju sprawiedliwości społecznej. Spojrzyenie teologa moralisty pozwoli spojrzeć na powinności z nią związane nie tylko jako obowiązek prawny (*debitum iuridicum*), ale widzieć je głębiej jako obowiązek moralny (*debitum morale*).

Słowa kluczowe: ekologia, ekologia integralna, sprawiedliwość, sprawiedliwość ekologiczna, *Laudato si'*, kryzys ekologiczny, katolicka nauka społeczna, religia i ekologia

Introduction

The issue of justice has always played a significant role in the Catholic moral doctrine. Important theological and moral syntheses regarding social issues took the form of treatises such as *De Justitia* or *De Justitia et Jure*, in which specific problems were discussed in the context of this cardinal moral virtue and social principle (Querejazu 1993, 23–62). Justice that governed social relations (primarily through compliance with the criterion of law observance) was mainly related to the problems of poverty, social inequalities, wealth, and goods distribution. Pope Francis has expanded this perspective by including ecological matters. While diagnosing and describing the contemporary ecological crisis and especially the inability to resolve it, he discerns the exact mechanisms underlying both the social and the ecological crises.

This means that the encyclical *Laudato si'* should be treated as a revolutionary text that proposes anew (analogically to the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* over 130 years ago) justice as the key to resolving the *new social question*, i.e., the contemporary ecological crisis.

The aim of this paper and our academic reflections in the shape of theological and moral discourse is to reinterpret the notion of *Environmental Justice* (developed within the framework of legal theory) as a new kind of social justice in the light of the assumptions of integral ecology put forward in *Laudato si'*. Our research perspective will help us answer the question of whether moral imperatives that flow from integral ecology can supplement the deficiencies of environmental justice as a legal norm.

The paper has three parts that refer to three major elements:

- Ecology seen through the prism of the contemporary ecological crisis
- The question of social justice, which, when referred to ecology, takes the form of environmental justice
- Pope Francis's assumptions of integral ecology

We find the justice issue to be the most important of all of the above as it has rarely occurred in commentaries on *Laudato si'*.

1. Pope Francis's Reinterpretation of the Ecological Crisis

“The ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity” (Francis 2015, 119). This vital statement from *Laudato si'* means that the ecological problem is anthropological. According to Francis, we cannot speak about two separate crises, environmental and social, for we have one complex socio-ecological crisis (Francis 2015, 115–136). For the Pope, climate change, environmental pollution, and destitution are interconnected. Thus, while showing ways of overcoming the ecological crisis, the Pope pays special attention to seeking integral solutions that consider the interactions of natural systems as well as social systems. As long as we deal with these matters separately, we are not able to achieve justice either to human beings or to nature (Sadowski 2016b, 155; Bołoz et al. 2016).

While diagnosing the contemporary ecological crisis and especially our inability to resolve it, the Pope discerns the same logic and mechanisms at the root of both the social and ecological crises. “The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty” (Francis 2015, 175). In other words, social and ecological crises are manifestations of the same global emergency (Francis 2015, 122). The rejection of justice as the social principle and the logic that the Pope refers to as “use and discard” lie at the root of these crises (Francis 2015, 123).

Apart from injustice, the distinguishing factors of this situation are distorted anthropocentrism, practical relativism, the pervasive technocratic paradigm, the cult of power, and the ideology of pan-economism. These currents and ideologies are at the core of the socio-ecological crisis, which

is always a form of injustice. As a response, Francis proposes integral ecology encompassing both nature and human and social dimensions (Francis 2015, 138), including work (Francis 2015, 128). Leo XIII saw justice (and truth) as the solution to his time's social issue (Leo XIII 1891, 2).

Similarly, Francis proposes justice as the socio-economic paradigm that pertains to environmental protection and a preferential option for the poor. Hearing *the cry of the natural world* and the cry of *the poor*, the Church points to justice thanks to which we can compassionately consider what poses a threat to our "human home": "A true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (Francis 2015, 49; cf. Łepko 2018; Łepko 2006).

2. Environmental Justice

This characteristic holistic perspective of *Laudato si'* regarding the contemporary global crisis as the socio-ecological crisis is analogous to the environmental justice concept developed in legal theory.

Before delving into further considerations, it is worth underscoring the exceptional harmony and compatibility between socio-ethical reflection and the category of environmental justice developed within the realm of political science and law.

In the literature on this subject, on political science in particular, environmental justice is often associated with the activities of ecological movements and organizations to safeguard environmental protection and its accessibility as a common good. The concept is linked to the social movement that emerged at the beginning of the 80s in the United States in response to the so-called ecological racism (e.g., conscious disposal of highly harmful waste or siting environmentally dangerous industrial facilities near the place of communities of non-white ethnicity and a low social and economic status). The correlation between environmental

risk and a given ethnic, racial, or social background has been increasingly emphasized. In the literature on the subject, the classic case of ecological injustice often cited is the Warren County case (NC), associated with the siting of a hazardous waste landfill in an area inhabited by the African-American community (Kosieradzka-Federczyk 2016, 157–158).

Why did this happen? Allegedly, it was thought that people of color would not protest because they had no financial resources or legal assistance to conduct an effective protest. In the context of Latin America, environmental justice is sometimes called "the ecology of the poor" (*ecologismo de los pobres*) or "popular ecology" (*ecologismo popular*). It is defined as the struggle of the poor for the protection of the environment, sustainable development, and fair access to our planet's natural resources (Martínez Alier 2009).

Thus, the issue of the protection of the environment has been broadened to include socio-economic issues. The concept of the living environment on Earth also encompasses cultural and social environments, and the concept of environmental justice itself has merged with other movements for the benefit of human rights, democracy, and social equality. At present, in many countries, including Poland, the basis for their functioning is the concept of civic society.

In this way, environmental justice encompasses not only environmental protection but treating it equally to social development and historical justice. It is not only about the right of an individual to a clean environment but also about the rights of entire social groups to be treated fairly regarding broadly understood environmental issues. In particular, it is about the rights of the local communities and minorities not to be discriminated against because of their race or class while ensuring equal access to environmental resources. Also, it is about their right to be free from poverty and pollution

and the right to sustainable and equitable development.

Because of various social, economic, and political situations in different countries, different social groups may be the subjects of environmental justice. Also, the very notion may serve to describe various events. Robert Richard Kuehn systematized various concepts regarding environmental justice. He enumerated four kinds of justice that contribute to environmental justice: distributive, procedural, corrective, and social justice (Kuehn 2000, 10681). There is no need to characterize them in detail as their names are self-explanatory. Let us, however, focus on procedural justice. It refers to maintaining democratic procedures that ensure equality, information, and communication. Practically speaking, these are all environmental decisions that must be observed in investments and allow broad social participation. Here, fair treatment of all entities is an essential issue (Kuehn 2000, 10688).

As for Polish legislation, it is worth mentioning the 2008 Act on Access to Environmental Information and Protection of the Environment, Public Participation in Environmental Protection, and Environmental Impact Assessments (Act 2008). Within European legislation, this role is fulfilled by the Aarhus Convention (ratified by Poland), which stands as the most advanced international legal instrument of social participation (United Nations 1998). Environmental justice is a value that should be protected. On the other hand, it is not a legal concept. It does not appear in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland or ordinary legislation (Habuda 2016, 105–117). Therefore, it is a concept that is not unequivocally regulated.

On a moral plane, the proper understanding of justice always depends on accurately determining the rights of the other person. Every right held by an individual generates an obligation for another. It is within the context of fulfilling this obligation that we must understand someone's just stance. Duties that flow from justice may

be perceived merely as legal obligations (*debitum iuridicum*) or, more profoundly, as moral obligations (*debitum morale*). We may succinctly define justice as giving (with unwavering will) the other person their due. "What is due" may be construed within the framework of specific law. However, it may also be interpreted at a deeper level – in the spirit of moral duty, which always refers to the fact that the other is a person (Nagórny 1997, 251). As for environmental justice, in the context of Christian personalist morality, it is necessary to move beyond a narrowly construed legal obligation, especially when considering the identified deficits regarding environmental justice as a legal norm, even if we assume that in the future, a process of codification respecting the idea of environmental justice will take place. Before delving into further analysis, it is crucial to highlight that by contextualizing environmental justice within the framework of integral ecology, we can surpass mere legal comprehension (while still acknowledging its significance). The distinction between legal obligation and moral obligation shows that a moral stance of justice does not always imply justice aligned with the legal order.

Fair use of environmental resources is the first moral imperative that spontaneously comes to one's mind while considering environmental justice. Here, environmental justice takes the form of a policy principle that puts it in the perspective of the common good. "The common good can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, 162), which is a category that is broader than duties that result from law. Here, one can see an analogy to other social principles, e.g., the principle of sustainable development or ecological safety. They hold a more robust legal position because they are included in legal texts. The position of environmental justice must still be interpreted (Habuda 2016, 109).

Interestingly, a similarly broad perspective of the essence of environmental justice (broader than narrowly understood legal protection of the environment) is characteristic of legal studies. Janina Ciechanowicz-McLean, a pioneer in environmental justice research in Poland, associates the essence of environmental justice with fair treatment of the environment, social development, and historical justice (Ciechanowicz-McLean 2016, 119). On the other hand, Piotr Korzeniowski perceives it as the category of axiological foundations of the law regarding environmental protection alongside biodiversity, sustainable development, or high environmental protection standards (Korzeniowski 2012, 249).

Thus, environmental justice, even though it is not an explicit legal concept and does not appear in constitutional or ordinary legislation, when “put” among legal principles and notions, it is associated with compliance with laws, those that regulate environmental protection and access to environmental resources. In this manner, to some extent, it resembles legal justice. However, ultimately, because of the deficits mentioned above and because it refers to the principles of common good, sustainable development, solidarity, and ecological security, it takes the form of social justice. In the contemporary teaching of the Church, the latter is not treated as yet another kind of justice. It emphasizes that justice is a crucial principle of social life. Because of the social nature of a person, every justice has, in fact, a social character and is “the decisive criteria of morality in the intersubjective and social sphere” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, 201).

3. Environmental Justice and Integral Ecology

At this point, environmental justice meets with the concept of integral ecology that may be perceived (as Francis does in his encyclical *Laudato si'*) as a response to the ecological crisis and the lack of legal clarity of the notion of environmental justice.

This is precisely thanks to its integrity, for an integral ecology “clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (Francis 2015, 137). Also, it encompasses environmental economics and social ecology, cultural ecology, and ecology of daily life (Francis 2015, 138–155).

From the perspective of these considerations, it is worth focusing on the last element, i.e., ecology of daily life. Apart from the ecology of urban areas and landscapes and the concern for immediate surroundings that define a person’s identity (our living space, home, workplace, neighborhood, etc.), Francis mainly speaks about the ecology of man. In its most profound sense, it denotes the necessary relationship between our life and moral law inscribed in our nature (Francis 2015, 115), i.e., our existential structure, which also includes the truth about our social nature. Francis associates the category of the ecology of man with the moral dimension. Similarly, environmental justice is perceived more broadly than only as a legal obligation.

According to Francis, “integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human,” which takes us into the realm of moral principles and principles of social life (Francis 2015, 11). Moreover, Francis speaks of social principles that are fundamental for social order: the common good (Francis 2015, 143–158) and justice (Francis 2015, 159–162). The correlation between justice and integral ecology holds significant importance in the context of these analyses. Also, it has a negative aspect because “an ethical and cultural decline [...] has accompanied the deterioration of the environment” (Francis 2015, 162). Thus, integral ecology should be rooted in a specific axiological foundation. Moreover, it is a realm where the approach to ecology takes on an exceptional character: its integrated understanding of the natural environment encompasses not only nature but also social and relational dimensions. Also,

it shows that such an interpretation of ecology allows us to think of the environment in terms of the common good and justice.

This paper cannot elaborate on the common good and its ecological dimension (cf. Zagończyk 2015). In the context of our previous reflections on environmental justice as social justice inherently oriented toward the common good, it is very exciting to see the connection between these two notions and their consequences. As Francis notes, “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound, and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (Francis 2015, 158).

Francis’s concept of integral ecology, in some aspects, references (Leonardo Boff and Thomas Berry) and, in others, differs from (Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman, Ken Wilber) earlier trends in integral ecology (Sadowski 2016a). It advocates for a new lifestyle that fosters ecological responsibility, shapes an ecological conscience, and develops a new ecological education model to build a sustainable world.

Practically, this manifests itself through implementing a sustainable work style (Francis 2015, 124–129) and rest (Francis 2015, 233–237), sustainable consumption (Francis 2015, 203–208), social engagement for nature conservation (Francis 2015, 196–198), and educating to peace with nature (Francis 2015, 225).

Moral imperatives that result from integral ecology complement and strengthen existing strategies for environmental protection. Integral ecology is a *soft power* concerning environmental policy and the assumptions of environmental justice, even if it is not yet grounded in environmental law doctrine. This is due to the mainly legal and institutional character of these strategies and the fact that they overlook or do not

recognize the significance of the dimension of an individual. Also, they consider moral, religious, esthetic, and emotional aspects only to a small degree. This is exemplified by successive agreements and international strategies within the UN, the European Union (EU), and other bodies – United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Fit for 55, and the European Green Deal, to name a few. These initiatives prove insufficient as they constantly need to be reworked and expanded. It seems that only by integrating the principles of environmental justice with the demands of integral ecology, which acknowledges and appreciates the importance of all the aspects mentioned above, can an optimal approach to environmental issues be achieved, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of actions aimed at overcoming the contemporary ecological crisis.

One can notice a certain analogy of coherence between the order of justice understood as a set of principles and rules and the axiologically and morally interpreted category of integral ecology in what Aristotle described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* regarding the relationship between justice and the concept of ἐπιείκεια (Arystoteles 2007, 189–190), English “equity” (Latin *equitas*). Aristotle notes that although justice and equity are the same and both are noble, equity is superior. Explaining this paradox, he points out that justice established is imperfect because it is formulated through general norms. Therefore, it requires correction. This correction is provided by equity, which is justice itself in a more profound sense. It ensures that its specific decisions do not deviate from its ideal (Arystoteles 2007, 189; cf. Soniewicka 2010, 90).

The integral ecology is rooted in “the integrity of human life, in the need to promote and unify all the great values” (Francis 2015, 224). It is also an ecology “made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation, and selfishness.” (Francis 2015, 230). As such, it becomes

a natural complement to environmental justice or an interpretation of its obligations not only as a legal duty (*debitum legalis*) but also as a moral duty (*debitum moralis*).

Conclusion

In a state governed by law, environmental justice as a form of legal justice is especially important because it allows us to specify and demonstrate the way to implement the principle of social justice. This principle is part of the constitution (Constitution 1997, Preamble, art. 2) or European treaties (as a general clause), thus being “a criterion for legal assessments of legal norms *in abstracto*.” Certainly, law alone does not suffice, and it must be accompanied by justice as a moral virtue complemented by the categories of the common good, solidarity, and responsibility.

At this point, it is worth signaling further possible research perspectives on environmental justice in the global context. An open issue – not discussed by Pope Francis or the author of the article due to the adopted research assumptions – is the analysis of the need for sustainable, equitable development and access to goods in conditions of profound cultural and civilizational differences as well as in terms of the possibilities of using resources. In other words, what sense does it make to provide (fair) access to advanced technologies and significant natural and technological resources (know-how) to that part of the population that can appreciate their value and use their potential only after its prior civilizational development? This situation, in turn, would first require many decades of intensive education, cultural changes aimed at intellectual development, and mindset changes. Of course, this process would also have to occur at the expense of the rich and powerful (by dedicating significant financial, human, and political resources). However, it would be a necessary step before one could consider making the goods available to those still waiting to use them. Addressing these issues in further research will redirect

the discussion beyond theory towards real solutions.

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