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## God's gift of Nature and man's responsibility

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### 1. The world as the realisation of God's creative plan

According to Christian theism, both man and Nature are the result of the same Creator's work. If this is indeed the case, it is man's task to read God's plan as Nature reveals it to him. This belief has been present in Christian thought since its beginnings, but it was probably expressed the most in the views of Saint Francis and Saint Bonaventure.

Saint Francis, ever faithful to the Scriptures, suggested treating Nature as a wonderful book through which God speaks to us and through which He shares some of His beauty and goodness with us. He quoted the Bible to support this idea: "For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wisdom 13:5 NABRE), as well as "His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what He has made" (Romans 1:20 NABRE). For this reason, Saint Francis requested that a section of the garden in his

monastery should always be left uncultivated to allow wild herbs to grow there, so that those who admire them might raise their thoughts to God, the Creator of such great beauty.<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that this practice was also observed in Benedictine monasteries before Saint Francis's time and, thanks to this practice, many monasteries have preserved the traditions of herbal medicine that were developed over the centuries.

Saint Francis's thought was continued by Saint Bonaventure. He believed that the world is a book of nature and from it, man reads the traces of God (*vestigia Dei*). This allows him to find the image (*imago*) of God. Man and the world are interrelated: the world lives in man, and man lives in the world; to a large extent, they are a unity. By knowing the world, we also come to know God: "It is necessary that we begin with a trace that is corporeal, conditioned by time and beyond us. In this way we enter God's path"<sup>2</sup> because "in every tangible and experiential reality God himself is hidden".<sup>3</sup> As Saint Bonaventure emphasised: "Contemplation is all the more sublime, the more one feels the action of God's grace in oneself or the more one is able to see God in other creatures"<sup>4</sup>

Saint Bonaventure wrote that "the consideration of the common origin of all creatures, filled [Saint Francis] with overflowing tenderness, and he called them all brothers and sisters, because they had all one origin with himself"<sup>5</sup> He called all creatures – even the objects of inanimate nature – brothers. He talked of Brother Sun and Sister Moon and observed that we all have the same Father. He argued that a mysterious, familial bond must exist between us and the rest of the created world. This was the origin of his conviction that all creatures are equal by virtue of their divine origin and because they bear witness to the glory of God. He denied the existence of both the hierarchy of creatures and the dualism between man and other creatures. Rather, he saw a community of living beings in the world and treated all of them as a value independent of human interests.

As St. Bonaventure emphasised, for a man who contemplates the world created by God and His dominion over it, it comes down to using (*uti*) goods and enjoying (*frui*) them. At the same time, he observed that goods can neither

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. Celano, *The Second Life of Blessed Francis*, CXXIV, 165:FF 750.

<sup>2</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. In *The Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. 2, transl. P. Boehner, Z. Hayes, New York 2002, p. 1259–1260.

<sup>3</sup> St. Bonaventure, *De reductione artium ad theologiam. On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, vol. 1, transl. Z. Hayes, New York 1996, p. 1254–1255, n. 6 (V, 325).

<sup>4</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Commentarius in II librum Sententiarum*, 23, 2,3.

<sup>5</sup> St. Bonaventure, *The Life of St Francis of Assisi*, North Carolina 2010, VIII, 6:FF 1145.

be destroyed nor created because this is the domain of the Holy Spirit. If the use is to be purposeful, it must be accompanied by love<sup>6</sup> and the awareness that earthly goods have a relative value that is inferior to higher values.

Saint Francis was the pioneer of the Christian tradition of thinking in ecological terms, although examples of such thinking can also be found in ancient Greece, where the concept of harmony defined the order of the cosmos. What does it mean to “think ecologically”? St. John Paul II expressed it succinctly: “one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos”.<sup>7</sup> The starry sky, the regularity of the seasons, and the rhythm of nature inspired both the Greeks and Saint Francis to reflect on the order of the cosmos and man’s place in it.

Saint Bonaventure infused Saint Francis’s ideas with metaphysical justification. As he emphasised, in order to reach God, man must restrain his pride and be humble. He must “lower himself” to know Nature, both animate and inanimate, since “the created world is a kind of book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity, at three different levels of expression: as a vestige, as an image, and as a likeness. The aspect of vestige (‘footprint’) is found in every creature; the aspect of image, only in intelligent creatures or rational spirits; the aspect of likeness, only in those spirits that are God-conformed. Through these successive levels, comparable to steps, the human intellect is designed to ascend gradually to the supreme Principle, which is God”.<sup>8</sup> While contemplating the world and discovering the meaning hidden in Nature, man begins to notice how the Holy Spirit embraces and orders the world and creates order and beauty in Nature. Every contact with Nature heightens man’s awe of God’s wisdom and power.

Saint Bonaventure also observed that the characteristic feature of man is his intentionality, his turning towards the world around him. In this sense, man transcends the earthly reality. Man is not an entity endowed with a specific nature and surrounded by the world. If he were such an entity, then, although he would possess distinct properties, he would not be radically different from other entities. Man is the only being who gets to know himself. At the same time, however in order to get to know himself, he must transcend himself, to “go beyond himself”.

<sup>6</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Commentarius in I, II, III, IV Librum Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, p. 1250–1252, d. 1, a. 1, q. 2, ad 2 (I 32).

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Breviloquim*. In *The Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. 9, transl. D.V. Monti, New York 2005, p. 1254–1257, p. 2. c. 1 (V 230).

The proponents of anthropocentrism impose on man a specific perception of the world in which humans are at its very centre. However, such a perception has been corrected and exceeded since the dawn of human history. After all, this is what it means to practice both science and philosophy. These disciplines ask questions about the essence of Being that is hidden behind the phenomena that are available to us thanks to their psychophysical structures. The ideas of Saints Francis and Bonaventure, which are centuries old and based on the assumption of human intentionality and on reading hidden signs, are convergent with the premises of contemporary phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Saint Bonaventure's theory of "intentional" cognition was also discussed by P. Ricoeur in his attempt to explain reality through symbols.<sup>9</sup> As the founder of hermeneutics observes, Saint Bonaventure's concept is a multi-stage process of discovering the reality in which a fundamental role is played by two correlative notions: *imago* and *exemplar*. In the first stage of discovering reality, which Ricoeur calls the phenomenological stage, this process is reduced to attempts at understanding symbols through other symbols, to penetrating the "symbolic universe" and the internal relations that constitute it. In Saint Bonaventure's work, this stage consists in internalizing cognition, which allows one to grasp the perceived similarity between the spiritual nature of the subject of cognition and the nature of God. As a result, the image of God as it is perceived in the immanent self-knowledge of the soul becomes the basis for grasping the totality of "being" as the image of God's ideas. The second stage is the hermeneutic interpretation of a text, whose indispensable element is faith, which enables "living and energising" exegesis and loving cognition (*cognitio affectiva*). As Ricoeur observes, "one must believe to be able to understand: the interpreter will never come close to what his text says if he does not live in the atmosphere of the meaning he is asking about". On the other hand, however, "only by understanding can we believe (...). We can only believe by interpreting".<sup>10</sup> These two poles of arriving at the truth are the elements of a process that develops and elevates our knowledge. In Saint Bonaventure's conception, the "text" to be understood and interpreted is both the Scriptures and the reality treated as a sign that represents God's ideas to the human intellect. The third part of the intellectual discovery of the meanings of symbols is, as Ricoeur calls it, the philosophical stage, which includes "thinking which begins with

<sup>9</sup> Cf. P. Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

symbols”. Such thinking consists of using a symbol as an element that makes it possible to deeply penetrate reality.<sup>11</sup>

In his analogy between the Creator and the created, Saint Bonaventure observed that the latter possesses a likeness (*similitudo*), an image (*imago*), or a vestige (*vestigium*) of God. For him, the concept of *imago* was the basic means of expressing the homogeneity of being and the subordination of the human intellect to God. Man is an organism – he is a being rooted in nature, but also a person. It is a person, i.e., a cognitive human being, who, upon finding himself at the centre of reality, reproduces the essence of being and expresses it in rational categories.<sup>12</sup> This, of course, was an assumption that idealised man. When man turned his gaze away from Nature, from the Divine transcendence, and lost the humility that is necessary to interact with the world, problems arose.

## 2. Man’s separation from Nature

At the time when Saint Francis lived, no one imagined that man would become the real ruler of the earth – nor that his activities would endanger nature and, consequently, himself. Although remaining an element of nature, at a certain point in his development, man stopped seeing himself as an element (one that is essential, but still only an element). Instead, he put himself in the place of God – and even above God, that is, he has put himself beyond good and evil and gave himself the right to decide about life and death. Pride has led to the extermination of hundreds of millions of people, to the degradation of the environment, and even to threats to the existence of the human species. The destruction of the environment accompanied the development of civilisation as a result of the ruthless exploitation of nature. We humans initially wanted to protect ourselves against nature, then we wanted to subdue it to serve our purposes. Finally, we desired to liberate ourselves from it and, by subjugating it, to become independent of it.

Aristotle wrote about this peculiar anthropocentric complacency of man: “If, therefore, nature does nothing without purpose or uselessly, it must have created everything for human beings”.<sup>13</sup> Due to this logic, as Hans Jonas noted, “the Promethean enterprise as such moves from the role of mere means (which every technique is by itself) to that of the end, and ‘the conquest of nature’

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Wolicka, *Hermeneutyka «Imago» w tekstach św. Bonawentury*, p. 192–194.

<sup>12</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Commentarius in II librum Sententiarum*, 16, 1, 3 ad 5.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, transl. T.A. Sinclair, London 1981, Book I, 7, 1265b.

appears as the vocation of mankind. *Homo faber* towers over *homo sapiens*, whose knowing is made a tool in the former's hands, and external power assumes the place of the highest good".<sup>14</sup>

Philosophical ideas were soon translated into technological practices. Man, as the lord of Nature and creator of civilisation, quickly began to employ technology to exploit nature. This exploitation frequently had no legal or moral limits and has led to a total arbitrariness of *homo sapiens* in some regions of the globe. This brutal interference was, after all, justified by man's unique position in the natural world, which gave rise to the given axiological status of nature. In extreme anthropocentrism, nature has only a utilitarian status, which is relative, value.

According to ancient and early Christian norms, the use of God's gifts should be guided by responsibility and moderation. However, based on the ideological justification of "dominion", greed, stupidity, and short-sightedness have led to the destruction of nature. The hubris of instrumental reason has led to cutting oneself off from nature, replacing it with artificial creations, and relativising its value depending on one's interests. Pope Francis observed: "When human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience, (...) in conjunction with the omnipresent technocratic paradigm and the cult of unlimited human power, the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests. There is a logic in all this whereby different attitudes can feed on one another, leading to environmental degradation and social decay".<sup>15</sup>

The degradation of nature and man's turning away from it leads to his degeneration. St. John Paul II warned mankind that "every ecological imbalance gives rise to dangers for man".<sup>16</sup> This was also emphasised by Pope Francis, who said: "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation".<sup>17</sup>

The world is more than a problem to be solved. Everything is interconnected. If man announces his independence from reality and appoints himself as an absolute ruler, the very basis of his existence crumbles, because "instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on

<sup>14</sup> H. Jonas, *Zasada odpowiedzialności. Etyka dla cywilizacji technologicznej*, transl. M. Klimowicz, Kraków 1996, p. 300.

<sup>15</sup> Francis, *Laudato si*, 122.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Eksperyment w biologii*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 1982/10/34, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Francis, *Laudato si*, 48.

the part of nature”.<sup>18</sup> Let us add – also of his own nature. As Pope Benedict XVI emphasised, there is also “an ecology of man” and “man, too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will”.<sup>19</sup> Our nature is connected with the nature of the world; if we destroy the world, we also destroy our nature.

It is not only Christian thinkers who address these problems. The consequences of instrumental rationality’s domination in modern culture were also discussed by the prominent Polish philosopher, Leszek Kołakowski. He emphasized that our civilisation, which springs from Christian sources, should be based on respect for every human person. However, now that it has been dominated by the spirit of rationalism and scientism, this current civilisation reduces “the human person to his or her function...”<sup>20</sup> A person so reduced loses his or her self-esteem and does not believe that his or her actions can have any influence on the changes taking place in the world. The mechanistic model of the world, which popularises instrumental rationalism, consequently encourages conformist attitudes and ethical relativism.

Another Polish philosopher, Henryk Skolimowski, (the founder of eco-philosophy) in opposing instrumentalism, pointed to two models of understanding the world. One is dominated by the vision of the human conqueror, while the other sees the world as a sanctuary. In this latter model, man is the protector. Skolimowski emphasised that “man was not created for consumption, but for self-realisation in his humanity”.<sup>21</sup> In his conception, man draws the strength for creative development from nature and its beauty. In doing so, the philosopher recognises that ecological reforms cannot be implemented without restoring a dimension of dignity and sacredness to man.

Some of Skolimowski’s views are similar to Max Scheler’s ideas. According to the latter, man must learn to understand anew “the great, invisible, mutual solidarity of all living beings in the totality of life, the solidarity of all spiritual beings in the eternal spirit, and the solidarity of the world’s development (Weltprozesses) with its history”.<sup>22</sup> In order for this to be possible, “the one-sided idea of man’s exclusive dominion over nature”, which has become “somewhat of an axiom of the Western world ethos (...) must be overcome in

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Speech in Bundestag*, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> L. Kołakowski, *O szacunku dla natury*, in: *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach*, Kraków 2010, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> H. Skolimowski, *Wizje nowego milenium*, Kraków 1999, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> M. Scheler, *Pisma z antropologii filozoficznej i teorii wiedzy*, transl. S. Czerniak, A. Węgrzeczki, Warszawa 1987, p. 221.

the future”. According to this well-known German phenomenologist, it is high time “to develop the cosmo-vital feeling of unity again by awakening it from Western man’s dormancy”.<sup>23</sup>

The question is how to wake up a man who spends most of his time in the virtual world. Studies reveal that many people, especially the youth, are addicted to computer games, social media, and other attractions offered by digital technology. They live neither healthily nor wisely, wasting the gifts of the same nature which they are part of and also unproductively squandering the gifts of nature that are used by others in order to satisfy their superficial needs. How do we wake up entrepreneurs and shareholders whose only goal is profit? How do we wake up politicians whose only goal is power? Finally, how do we wake up the billions of people who have been dumbed down by the media deluge of irrelevant information? Is philosophical reflection capable of moving humanity?

If we do not wake-up, mankind, or rather humanity, may not survive. The world created by God is sacred, and its destruction or unjustified abuse is a reprehensible sacrilege. In this context, it is worth quoting the Scriptures: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person” (1 Corinthians 3:17 NABRE). Who could say with certainty that God does not have an “emergency option” (e.g., another flood) or that man is the pinnacle of His creative powers? One can even imagine that removing man from this planet would be to everyone’s benefit, that – after the Anthropocene epoch<sup>24</sup> – a new species would do a much better job of solving the problems we are unable to deal with. Or perhaps, properly programmed artificial intelligence will do it for us. The fact that the world has been wisely created does not exclude the possibility of someone other than man fulfilling the Divine Plan better than we do. The human species cannot exist independently of the existence of the biosphere and the Earth, but both the Earth and the biosphere can easily exist independently of humans.

### 3. Man’s responsibility for the future

Today, as in the previous millennia, lost human beings are still searching for their identity, a sense of unity with the world, and a sense of their existence in this world. They are trying to find the harmony that was created by the Divine Artist in both this world and in themselves. They are constantly searching for

<sup>23</sup> M. Scheler, *Istota i forma sympatii*, transl. S. Czerniak, Warszawa 1980, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> This phrase is used by Yuval Noah Harari in his book *Homo deus. A brief history of tomorrow*.



a unified image of the world in which they can find and realise their deepest aspiration to live fully. We are looking for a vision of the world in which man could realise his potential, find peace and, like Saint Francis, “rejoice in all the works of the Lord’s hands and, by the glory and beauty of that mirror (...) arise to the principle and cause of them all”<sup>25</sup> As we mentioned earlier, it was Saint Francis of Assisi who began the tradition – initially marginalized – of ecological Christian thinking. From this perspective, we are not the most important species in the work of creation – we are only an element of this world, and we are dependent on it.

Representatives of this perspective describe the relationship between man and nature using the metaphor of a good steward rather than a despotic master. They argue that the notions of “subdue the earth” and “have dominion” over other creatures have not been properly interpreted by the readers of the Bible. Man is a steward who was selected by God and not a self-ruler, because God entrusted all that was created in the Garden of Eden to his care (and not to his whims). They emphasize that all living creatures, being the work of the Creator, require man’s kindness, care, and good treatment; consequently, the protection of Nature is man’s duty that was commanded by God. As Pope Francis emphasises, “our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship”<sup>26</sup>

Many of Saint Francis’ ideas have been elaborated on by contemporary environmentalists, including Lee Keekok, who argues that not only all living beings, but also inanimate nature and all objects in the Universe, have intrinsic value.<sup>27</sup> The aim of many ethicists and practitioners of environmental ethics is to defend the natural world against human aggression and destructive actions and to defend human beings as individuals and species against the ecological threats they cause. Undoubtedly, such ecological thinking being endorsed by a growing number of thinkers, politicians, and entrepreneurs is a reason to rejoice. It is a pity, however, that it appears so late, and only when we see the cataclysm looming on the horizon.

We are finally realising that man’s ethical responsibility starts at the point where his power begins. In the past, when nature escaped man’s control, it was difficult to take responsibility for it. Today, man’s power over nature is still limited, but the limits have been pushed. As a result, man must become “more” responsible for the functioning of Nature. As our technological possibilities

<sup>25</sup> St. Bonaventure, *The Life of St Francis of Assisi*, North Carolina 2010, p. 237–344.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, *Laudato si*, 116.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. L. Keekok, *Awe and Humility. Intrinsic Value in Nature. Beyond an Earthbound Ethics*.

increase, the responsibility of all mankind for our common stewardship of the earth must also increase – this is one of the basic ethical duties of human beings, who, after all, have granted themselves the right to decide on the shape and direction of the world's development.

In our conclusions, we do not go as far as Hans Jonas, who claimed that: "It is at least not senseless anymore to ask whether the condition of extrahuman nature, the biosphere as a whole and in its parts, now subject to our power, has become a human trust and has something of a moral claim on us not only for our ulterior sake but for its own and in its own right. If this were the case, it would require quite some rethinking in basic principles of ethics. It would mean to seek not only the human good but also the good of things extrahuman, that is, to extend the recognition of 'ends in themselves' beyond the sphere of man and make the human good include the care for them. No previous ethics (outside of religion) has prepared us for such a role of stewardship – and the dominant, scientific view of *Nature* has prepared us even less".<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, in our opinions, man is "equipped" with an anthropocentric cognitive perspective which determines his capacity to perceive nature. Therefore, considering oneself as a trustee or a depositary of nature entails certain dangers. The assumption that we know and understand what nature needs (and, therefore, we can speak on its behalf) is another manifestation of human hubris and poses more threats to nature and man. We are now aware that our knowledge is hypothetical. This means that the technological possibilities of implementing various hypotheses seem to be almost unlimited, thus possible mistakes, even made with good intentions, may lead to tragic consequences. Jonas warned us against this: "If the new nature of our acting then calls for a new ethics of long-range responsibility, coextensive with the range of our power, it calls in the name of that very responsibility also for a new kind of humility – a humility owed, not like former humility to the smallness of our power, but to the excessive magnitude of it, which is the excess of our power to act over our power to foresee and our power to evaluate and to judge".<sup>29</sup>

Considering these grave words, we must be cautious in our future actions, and we should read the Book of Nature with greater humility. We cannot arbitrarily define some far-fetched aims for evolving and developing Nature. It seems that Nature's most probable aim is its stability as a whole. Thus, it is worth defining the conditions necessary for maintaining an equilibrium

<sup>28</sup> Cf. H. Jonas, *Zasada odpowiedzialności. Etyka dla cywilizacji technologicznej*, transl. M. Klimowicz, Kraków 1996, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 56.

between man and all other elements of Nature and implementing them. In this field, there is room for in-depth research (already being done) to be conducted by the natural sciences, although the research done so far seems to be too fragmentary.

In such a context, it is worth noticing the analogy between our attitudes towards the environment and our medical theories and practices. Modern medicine, despite its unquestionable successes, mostly treats the symptoms of diseases. Antibiotics and other synthetic drugs often lead to a weakening of the immune system, which makes the human body susceptible to other diseases. Old natural medicine treated people holistically, looking for the causes of illnesses also in sources other than those responsible for the symptoms. Such holistic thinking on a higher level can be found in the ecological ideas of various environmental philosophers, including H. Jonas, and in the integral ecology of Pope Francis, in which the ecology of nature is linked to the ecology of man and healing Nature must be linked to healing man and his social relationships. We are aware that Nature and man continuously influence each other,<sup>30</sup> and that getting to know Nature better allows man to also know himself. Christian ecological thinking is based on a holistic view of both the human and non-human reality, and its aim is to create a new paradigm that could serve as the foundation for our world's development. However, ecological thinking calls for a novel, holistic view of reality, both human and non-human. A new paradigm is needed, one that sets long-term goals for humanity, allowing for both our continued development and our continued existence. The core value of such a paradigm must be a cross-cultural, solidarity-based co-responsibility for the world that is our common good. In order to achieve this, it is essential to raise awareness that we are inextricably linked to nature, and that consumerism and the associated predatory exploitation of the planet pose a mortal threat to all humanity. This requires working on developing the imagination and humility when it comes to any interference with nature.

Such a paradigm must be based on new (or perhaps – renewed) ethics that take into account both the present possibilities and present and future threats. Ethics that would also understand man's present, and even his future causative power to do things, since such power is undoubtedly growing, although it is not accompanied by any corresponding increase in responsibility. Ethics that would, first of all, oblige us to take greater responsibility for our common home.

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<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 30.

It would be ethics that do not oppose progress but seek to ensure that this progress takes place evenly in every area. This would be an ethic of sustainability, both civilisational and moral: helping to restore modern man's sense of self-worth, while showing that the goal of happiness can be achieved through connection with other people and with the world, co-creating the common good. This would be an ethic that understands responsibility as man's response to the divine gift of creation.

In proposing such new ethics, which would have a universal dimension and a universal impact, we must, of course, take into account the point of view of those who do not see the sacred dimension of Nature. Hence it is necessary to acknowledge that nature has intrinsic value – not only as the work of God but also a tangible value. Pragmatic and economic arguments offer adequate support for this new ethics. It can be argued that other living organisms should be protected as a reservoir of genetic material or as a source of medicinal substances, both for people living today and for future generations. One can also argue for their protection by referring to gnoseological arguments, for example, man's need for knowledge and the fact that nature is an inspiring source of that knowledge. Furthermore, knowledge leads to understanding, and it is difficult to understand the world around us if some of its elements disappear. Finally, von Hayek's call for the creation of a world "in which we would like our children to live" would undoubtedly be a convincing pragmatic argument for many people.<sup>31</sup>

The necessary condition for the spread of such ethics is dialogue, which allows us to reach out to others in order to understand them and to be able to help them, help ourselves, and help God in creating a better world. We already have "a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. (...) Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story that can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us".<sup>32</sup> These initiatives develop ecological sensitivity and a sense of shared responsibility.

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<sup>31</sup> F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty. Vol.2. The Mirage of Social Justice*, Chicago–London 1976, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Francis, *Laudato si*, 232.

However, in order for such attitudes to become widespread, we need a global transformation in two areas: in society's ways of thinking and in the institutions that consolidate this transformation. We can hope to be successful in this endeavour only by integrating transformation in these two areas through science, education, economy, and value systems. Environmental education is particularly important. Apart from criticising the ideological myths of modernity (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, and the unregulated market), it should restore "the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God".<sup>33</sup> Environmental education should be directed particularly at the young generation and at those who are preparing for the future management of natural resources. A vital element of this educational strategy would be the establishment of ecological organisations that are aimed at promoting an ecological mindset, especially among the young generation, in whose hands the future of the earth now lies. There is an urgent need to change the modern way of thinking about ecological issues, but we will not achieve a paradigm shift in thinking and feeling until there is a generational change. For these reasons, it is so important to shape the ecological sensitivity of young people.

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## Summary

### God's gift of nature and human responsibility

Both man and nature are the work of the same Creator. Although we distinguish man from Divine works, we know that man is also an element of nature and cannot be considered independent of it. The human task is to read God's plan as it is contained in nature and prudently participate in the work of God. The use of God's gifts should therefore be characterized by responsibility and moderation. However, greed, stupidity, and irresponsibility lead to the destruction of nature. The pride in instrumental reason leads to technocracy,

detachment from nature, and the replacement of nature with artificial products. This involves a number of threats (such as the damaging of relationships: with God, with nature, with other people). People's attitude towards nature affects not only its, but also their, condition. Man's degradation of nature and his turning away from it contribute to his own degeneration. The threat to nature is also a threat to man.

The Christian attempt to respond to the ecological crisis is the vision of integral ecology. The human being's current causative power demands a revision or extension of ethical reflection so that we will be obliged to be more responsible for our common home. Responsibility is man's answer to the Divine gift of creation. A prerequisite for the spreading of such ethics is dialogue, which enables one to meet others, to be able to understand them, and to be able to help them (and himself) in enacting the implementation of God's plan for the world.

### **Streszczenie**

#### **Boży dar natury i ludzkiej odpowiedzialności**

Zarówno człowiek, jak i przyroda są dziełem tego samego Stwórcy. Chociaż odróżniamy człowieka od dzieł Bożych, wiemy, że jest on także elementem przyrody i nie można go uważać za niezależnego od niej. Zadaniem człowieka jest odczytanie planu Bożego zawartego w naturze i rozważne uczestnictwo w dziele Bożym. Dlatego korzystanie z darów Bożych powinno cechować się odpowiedzialnością i umiarem. Jednak chciwość, głupota i nieodpowiedzialność prowadzą do zniszczenia natury. Pycha rozumu instrumentalnego prowadzi do technokratyzmu, oderwania się od natury i zastępowania jej sztucznymi wytworami. Wiąże się to z szeregiem zagrożeń (m.in. zerwania relacji: z Bogiem, z przyrodą, z innymi ludźmi). Stosunek człowieka do przyrody wpływa nie tylko na jej, ale także na jego kondycję. Degradacja przyrody przez człowieka i odwracanie się od niej przyczynia się do jego własnej degeneracji. Zagrożenie dla przyrody jest także zagrożeniem dla człowieka.

Chrześcijańską próbą odpowiedzi na kryzys ekologiczny jest wizja ekologii integralnej. Obecna moc sprawcza człowieka wymaga rewizji lub rozszerzenia refleksji etycznej, abyśmy byli zobowiązani do większej odpowiedzialności za nasz wspólny dom. Odpowiedzialność jest odpowiedzią człowieka na Boski dar stworzenia. Warunkiem szerzenia takiej etyki jest dialog, który pozwala spotkać innych, zrozumieć ich i pomóc im (i samemu sobie) w urzeczywistnieniu planu Bożego wobec świata.