

The Role of Religious Argumentation in Shaping Pro-ecological Attitudes of Christians in Poland

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Summary

Religious arguments are an important factor influencing people's daily choices. These choices result in, among others, relation to the natural environment and further contribute to improving or deteriorating its condition. This article is aimed at highlighting the ecological potential of Poles' religious argumentation by presenting common arguments based on their professed faith. In addition, this study presents religious arguments used in the statements made by official representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland on environmental issues and provides examples of religiously inspired initiatives for the environment undertaken by lay Christians.

Keywords

ecological crisis, Christianity, religious argumentation, Poland, religion and ecology

Introduction

The modern ecological crisis presents one of the biggest challenges ever faced by humanity. This crisis is currently more and more commonly referred to as global and total. Global – because its effects reach every corner of our planet. Its manifestations can be observed even in areas considered as virgin and free of human interference. The crisis, moreover, has a total character, as its effects permeate deep into the very structure of nature. Consequently, all inhabitants of the earth commonly experience the effects of this crisis although in varying intensity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the destructive effects of the environmental crisis are becoming

more intensely felt by people in Poland, making them increasingly aware of the issue and prompting them to undertake activities aimed at counteracting their sources.

Polish Christians have for some time already been aware of the moral dimension of the ecological crisis, i.e. the moral dimension of their attitude to nature. The teaching of the universal Church and examples of statements from other local churches help identify the most fundamental causes of the crisis and seek ways to counteract its effects.

Studies of Poles' religiosity confirm that religious argumentation is an important factor influencing people's attitudes. It seems, that the use of this kind of argument

for shaping pro-environmental attitudes of Polish Christians can significantly contribute to improving their ecological awareness and their commitment to the care for the condition of the environment. This study aims to show the religious arguments used in contemporary ecological debate among Polish Christians and their environmental initiatives inspired by religious motives.

1. Research on the impact of religious beliefs on people's daily choices

In 2006-2008, the Gallup Institute conducted research on the importance of religion in everyday life among people from 143 countries. The research findings clearly point out the significance of this impact. The conducted research shows that, on average, up to 82% of all respondents regard religious beliefs as important and affecting their daily lives. However, the results differ significantly depending on the world region. On the one hand, as many as 8 out of 11 countries in which almost all respondents (at least 98%) confirmed that religion plays an important role in their lives, are poor countries located in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, the majority of countries where religions appear to have only a slight impact on the lives of their citizens, are countries with the highest standard of living (Scandinavian countries, Japan and Hong Kong) and some countries remaining during the communist period under strong influence of the Soviet Union (Estonia, Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic and Belarus). Finally, the findings of research conducted in 27 developed countries show that, on average, 38% of citizens admit that religion plays an important role in their lives (Web-01).

The research findings for Europe indicate that the impact of religion on the lives of the inhabitants of this continent is generally lower than in other regions of the world.

The Gallup Institute research confirms that the impact of religion on the daily lives of Poles, compared to other Europeans, is

relatively high. The percentage of Polish respondents who confirmed the importance of this impact reaches 75%, and only 19% of them expressed a different opinion (Web-04).

Research conducted on the impact of religion on the lives of believers indicates that for many people, religions provide answers to all or at least to most of today's problems. Similar research conducted in the US confirms that the percentage of Americans who share this belief is stable and amounts to approx. 55% (Web-05). In addition, studies of religiosity in many countries indicate that active religious life leads to higher than average involvement in social activities (Pew Research Center 2019: 5). Research conducted among members of the so-called old European Union confirms that participation in local associations and social involvement varies significantly depending on the involvement of Christians in their religious life. The average findings of research on involvement in the life of local communities in these countries amount to, respectively: 18% in the case of people who do not identify with any religion, 17% in the case of Christians who are poorly involved in religious life, 19% in the case of Christians showing average involvement in religious life and as much as 28% in the case of Christians who are actively involved in religious life (Pew Research Center 2018: 144). Research on the beliefs of American Christians also indicate that they more often combine their faith with pro-ecological behaviour. Especially when it comes to commitment to environmental protection, recycling and buying products made by environmentally friendly companies (Pew Research Center 2016: 8-9).

In Poland, systematic studies of religiosity have been conducted since 1997. These studies clearly show that the declaration of faith remains unchanged. Currently, the percentage of Poles declaring themselves as believers is 92%, including 8% as deeply religious. The percentage of people declaring themselves as rather or completely non-believers is also 8% (CBOS 2018: 1-2).

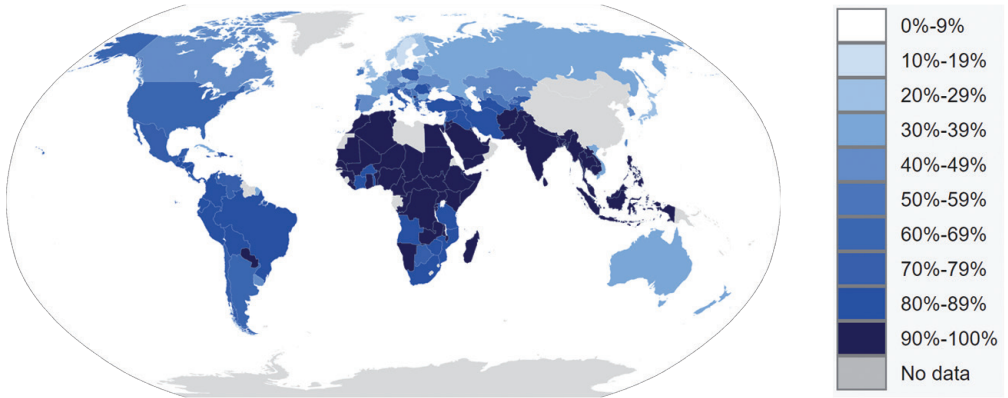


Fig. 1. 2008/2009 Gallup poll on whether respondents said that religion was “important in [their] daily life” (Web-02)

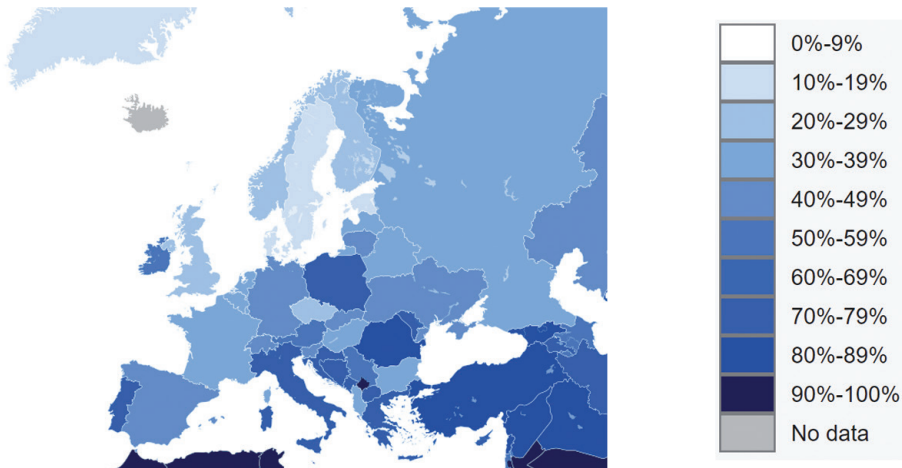


Fig. 2. 2008/2009 Gallup poll on whether respondents said that religion was “important in [their] daily life” (Web-03)

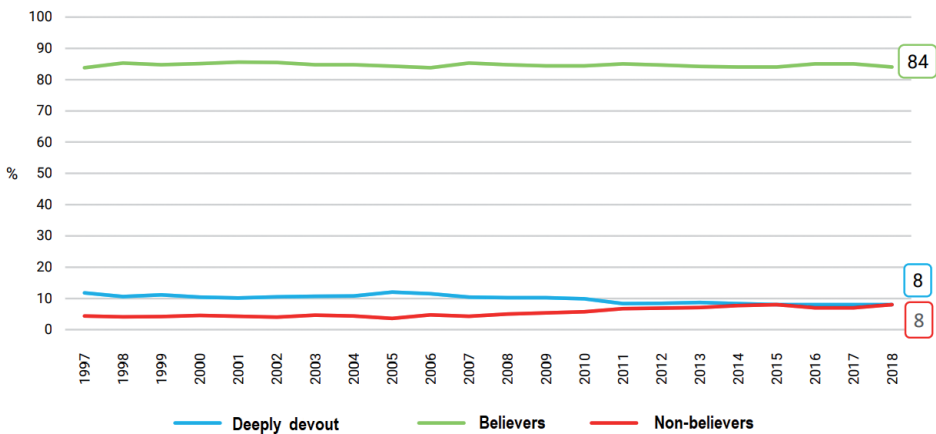


Fig. 3 Declaration of faith (CBOS 2018: 2)

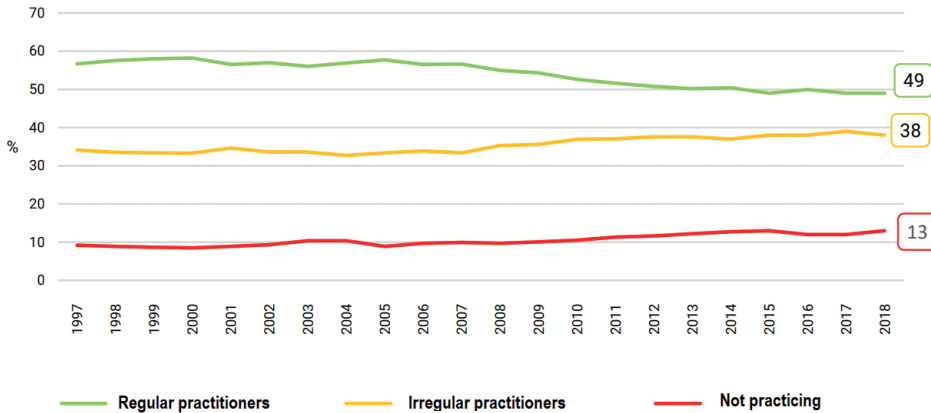


Fig. 4. Declaration of participation in religious practices (CBOS 2018: 3)

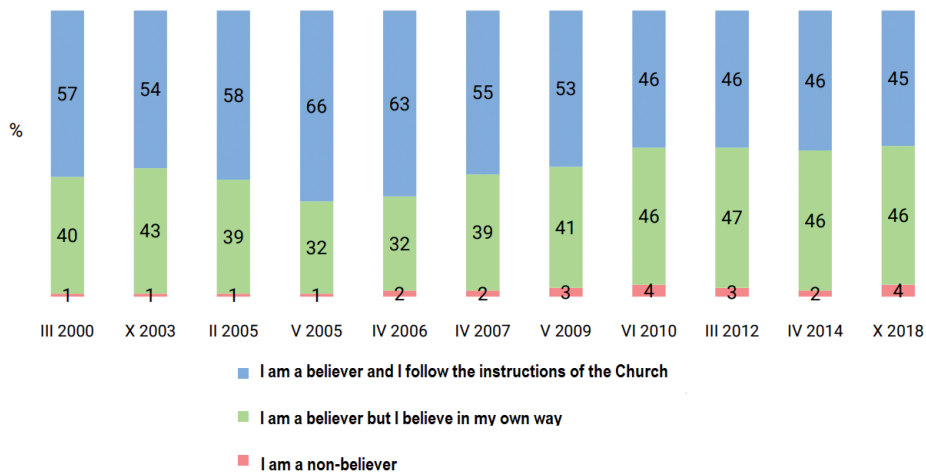


Fig. 5. Conformity of faith with the teaching of the Catholic Church (CBOS 2018: 4)

The number of people participating in religious practices in Poland has hardly changed over the last decade. According to research from 2018, 49% of respondents declare regular practice (at least once a week), 38% declare irregular practice (1-2 times a month or several times a year), while 13% of respondents declare that they do not participate in religious practices. (CBOS 2018: 3).

Declarations of conformity as regards Poles' faith with the teaching of the Catholic Church also remain at the same level. Since 2010, the number of people declaring conformity of their faith to the teaching

of the Church and people who selectively refer to this teaching have been evenly matched. According to data from 2018, 45% of respondents declared orthodoxy, 46% declared that they believe in their own way, while 4% declared to be non-believers (CBOS 2018: 4).

2. Religious arguments for environmental protection

The result of the research on Poles' religiosity indicate that religious argumentation can play an important role in shaping pro-ecological attitudes. These studies confirm that a significant part of the Polish society

follows the indications of the Church. Over the second decade of the 21st century, this percentage remains stable and oscillates between 45% and 46%. It should also be noted that in the same period a similar percentage of Poles declare to believe in their own way (46-47%) (CBOS 2018: 4). This does not necessarily mean that from among the people belonging to the second group, no one takes into account the Church's indications regarding the attitude towards the environment. On the contrary, it can be assumed that a significant proportion of people who selectively refer to the teaching of the Church take into account religious arguments about the attitude towards nature. It seems, therefore, that without fear of exaggeration we may safely assume that the overwhelming majority of Poles are open to religious arguments regarding ecological issues. A closer analysis of this argumentation shows that it draws mainly on the Bible, Christian anthropology and theological arguments contained in Church documents.

2.1. Biblical argumentation

There are many indications that biblical arguments can make a major contribution to the public discourse on environmental protection. It can also become the subject of reflection for Sunday homilies, catechesis, meetings of religious communities and movements, as well as for personal reflection of Christians. Analysing the biblical passages addressed with reference to ecological themes, it is possible to identify several key arguments supporting respect for nature. It seems that the most frequently used ones are as follows:

- creation is the property of the Creator
- the Creator cares for non-human nature
- creation reveals its Creator
- creation worships the Creator and encourages man to do the same
- the Creator has entrusted man with responsibility to care for creation

- abuse of creation is a sin and it will be punished
- salvation embraces the whole creation

One of the most common biblical arguments used in the ecological debate is that God created the world and that it is He who is its owner. This is confirmed by, among others, the following biblical passages: Gen 1-2; Ps 24:1; 1 Chronicles 29: 11-14.

Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the splendour, length of days and glory, everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours is the sovereignty, Yahweh; you are exalted, supreme over all. Wealth and riches come from you, you are ruler of all, in your hand lie strength and power, and you bestow greatness and might on whomsoever you please. So now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your majestic name, for who am I and what is my people, for us to be able to volunteer offerings like this? – since everything has come from you and we have given you only what you bestowed in the first place (1 Chron. 29:11-14)¹.

The Bible leaves no doubt that man is not God's sole concern. The Creator cares for the whole of creation, including non-human nature. This is best expressed by the words that God spoke to Noah, when establishing a covenant with him, his descendants as well as with all living beings (Gen. 9:9-11). Numerous biblical passages indicate the Creator's concern for nature for its own sake, and not because of its usefulness for man. This is well illustrated by the passage that God provides sufficient water for wild animals (Ps. 104:10-11) and plants (Jb. 38:25-27). Both the Old Testament and the New Testament abound in passages that evoke concern for animals: Deut. 25:4; Mt. 10:29; Mt 6:28-30; Luke 12:6; Luke 14:5; Luke 15:4-7. Psalm 104 expresses in a poetic

¹ All biblical texts are quoted from an online edition of the Bible available on the website: <www.catholic.org/bible/>.

way the Creator's care for the well-being of nature.

How countless are your works, Yahweh,
all of them made so wisely!
The earth is full of your creatures. (...)
They all depend upon you,
to feed them when they need it.
You provide the food they gather,
your open hand gives them their fill.
Turn away your face and they panic;
take back their breath and they die and
revert to dust.
Send out your breath and life begins;
you renew the face of the earth
(Ps. 104:24. 27-30).

Another important argument in support of the care for nature is that creation reveals the existence of the Creator and many of His attributes. The Bible explicitly states that "ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things" (Rom. 1:20; see also Wisdom 13:1). Christian understanding of nature is far from pantheism. For the Christian, nature is not tantamount to God but it constitutes a manifestation of the Creator's power. This is well illustrated by the words of prophet Amos "He it is who makes the Pleiades and Orion, who turns shadow dark as death into morning and day to darkest night, who summons the waters of the sea and pours them over the surface of the land. Yahweh is his name" (Amos 5:8). Although creation is not God, it is filled with His presence. The Prophet Habakkuk puts it in the following way, "His majesty covers the heavens, and his glory fills the earth" (Hab. 3:3). The prophet Isaiah, on the other hand, emphasizes the possibility of recognizing in nature the existence of the Creator and His power (Isa. 49:26).

An important argument in support of the care for nature is the biblical message that the creation worships the Creator. Although the Bible abounds in such

passages, the book of Psalms presents this idea particularly clearly (Ps. 148; Ps. 66:1b-4). Saint Paul speaks in a similar vein "I heard all the living things in creation – everything that lives in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, crying: To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honor, glory and power, for ever and ever" (Rev 5:13). Nature not only praises its Creator but also encourages man to do likewise – "See the rainbow and praise its Maker, so superbly beautiful in its splendor" (Ecless. 43:11). One of the best illustrations of worshiping the Creator is the "Canticle of the Three Young Men", which lists numerous elements of inanimate and animate nature and man, and encourages them all to glorify the Creator (Dan. 3:51-90).

Another important biblical argument for the protection of nature is the command to care for creation. This command means that although man is entitled to benefit himself from the gifts of nature, he also bears some responsibility towards that nature. The Biblical scene of the creation of the world explicitly illustrates the fact that the Creator allows man to subdue the earth and rule over all creatures (Gen. 1:28). At the same time, however, God imposes on man the obligation to cultivate land and take care of all creation (Gen. 2:15). From the beginning, the Creator puts some constraints on human disposal of nature (Gen. 2:16-17). In this way, He emphasizes that man is only a tenant, regent of the heritage he is entrusted with and can only dispose of it within the limits defined by God.

The Bible recurrently imposes on man constraints with respect to the use of natural resources. This is particularly evident in the establishment of the Sabbath year (Lev. 25:1-12), the division of animals into clean and unclean (Deut. 14:4ff), and in the care of trees (Deut. 20:19-20; Lev. 19:23ff) and animals (Prov. 12:10; Deut. 22:6-7). The biblical model of the mastery over creation and care for it is well expressed in the excerpt from the Book of Wisdom "God

of our ancestors, Lord of mercy, who by your word have made the universe, and in your wisdom have fitted human beings to rule the creatures that you have made, to govern the world in holiness and saving justice and in honesty of soul to dispense fair judgment" (Wisdom 9:1-3). This passage indicates that in God's intention, the right to use nature is given only to man who is characterized by specific moral predispositions, namely, holiness, justice and righteousness of the heart. Man shaped in this way will not abuse his power over other beings and will fulfil his obligation to care for creation.

The Bible leaves no doubt that any abuse of the work of creation is a sin in the eyes of the Creator and will be punished by him. St. John in the Apocalypse even states that God will destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:18).

Another argument supporting concern for creation is the biblical message conveying the idea of the universality of salvation, which is not limited to man but includes all creation. Old Testament prophecies foretelling the messianic times foretell the next covenant that the Creator will make with all creation. This covenant will also include animals and birds leading to universal peace and security (Hos. 2:20). In the intention of the Creator, the messianic times will restore the original harmony of man with nature, which prevailed before the fall of the first parents (Isa. 11:6-9).

Summing up the biblical arguments for the protection of nature, it can be stated that the offenses of man against nature and abuse in the management of the earthly heritage entrusted to man result in a list of offenses against God, another man and nature.

Rejecting the thesis that God is the only owner of the world leads to usurpation of His power and constitutes a trespassing against God.

The biblical message of the Creator's concern for non-human nature should induce people to do the same. Man is obliged to follow God and obey His commands, consequently, lack of concern

for nature stands in contradiction to the will of the Creator.

- Rejection of the biblical thesis that creation reveals its Creator leads to the fact that the destruction of nature hinders or even prevents man from recognizing the existence of the Creator and His numerous attributes.
- Human disregard for the biblical argument that creation worships its Creator leads to the fact that destruction of nature diminishes His glory. Therefore, it goes directly against God but also against creation by constricting its praise, at the same time, man deprives himself of nature's encouragement to worship God.
- Human trespassing on the Creator's command to care for creation constitutes a direct violation of that command, and as a consequence, it negatively affects man and nature.
- The biblical argument about punishment for abuse of nature has both natural and supernatural consequences for the perpetrator.
- Transgression against the biblical thesis that salvation concerns all creation constitutes a violation of the intrinsic value of nature and a departure from the Creator's idea that at the end of time man and the restored creation will enjoy the glory of God.

2.2. Theological argumentation

Based on biblical texts, Christian theological tradition has developed numerous arguments for responsible human care for other creatures. Without going into details, one can point out the main theological arguments in support of building peaceful relations between man and nature. This argumentation arises from Christian anthropology, according to which man cannot be reduced solely to a material dimension. Man, in the depth and complexity of his being, is a mystery that can only be finally discovered from

the perspective of faith. In this approach, man is a being who enjoys a special status because of the inherent and inalienable dignity of the human person. Unfortunately, we are currently dealing with attempts to reduce man only to his physicality by highlighting human similarity to the animal world, in other words, to reduce man only to his material dimension. It should be emphasized, however, that this material dimension is only part of the human essence. On the other hand, there are also voices trying to reduce man to his spirit, which can lead to exclusive idealism and idolatrous worship of human thought (Paul VI 1974: 415-418).

In Christian view, man is a two-dimensional being, as he is immersed in the material reality but his goals are directed at the spiritual reality. Consequently, overlooking or diminishing the significance of any of these realities for his development would be a fundamental error. The concept of man understood in this way influences human attitude to nature. On the one hand, it shows man's affinity with the rest of creation, on the other, his uniqueness. It must also be remembered that man is a reflection of the creative work of God, who created him out of love and for love. In the Christian perspective, man can only develop when he develops in himself love for God, for another man and for the rest of creation (Wojtyła 1982: 42-43). In addition, as the only representative of creation endowed with freedom, man can take responsibility for the world entrusted to him by God. Therefore, the gift of freedom must be used by man in such a way as to lead to his development of man in all his dimensions and to his activity that will be a kind of continuation of the divine work of creation.

Therefore, the Christian vision of man provides the basis for his relationship with nature. Recognizing his kinship with the rest of creation and the responsibility which the Creator imposed on him, man is called to wise and just management of the heritage that he was entrusted

with. Acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature, man is obliged to respect it not only because of its usefulness, but for its own sake. Aware of the fact that God is calling him to be rather than to have, man should treat material goods with reserve and resists the culture of consumerism. He should strive for integral development that takes into account both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the human person. As a love-oriented being, man offers his love to the world in which he lives and throws off selfishness whose manifestations hurt other people as well as animate and inanimate nature. Recognizing his obligation to treat others in a fair and solidary way (both individuals and other creatures), he is ready to make sacrifices for the sake of future generations.

Numerous detailed arguments have been developed in favour of concern for divine heritage based on the Christian vision of the world and man. These arguments are often cited in Church documents and serve to shape the right relationship between man and creation.

3. Examples of using religious arguments in the ecological activity of the Church

The above-presented wide panorama of Christian religious arguments for the protection of nature is used both in the statements made by representatives of the universal Church and individual local churches. Those arguments can be discerned, on the one hand, in the teaching of the Church, and on the other, in its activity. In addition, those arguments are used by both official representatives of church institutions and lay faithful gathered in Christian communities and movements.

3.1. Ecological commitment of the universal Church

Over the past four decades, environmental issues have been recurrently raised by popes and, beginning with Pope John Paul II, this issue has been constantly present

in their statements. Numerous homilies, speeches, messages and even documents of the rank of exhortations, apostolic letters or encyclicals address the issue of the ecological crisis. Successive popes raise this topic both in the community of the Church and in the space of global discourse on the greatest challenges facing humanity today. Often, statements on environmental topics are directed not only to the Church members, but also to followers of other religions and all people of good will. Environmental issues have also become the subject of many ecumenical initiatives of the highest Church authorities. This is well illustrated by the joint messages of successive popes and the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople – Bartholomew I (John Paul II, Bartholomew I 2002; Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I 2006; Francis, Bartholomew I 2017).

The culmination of the Catholic Church's official teaching on environmental issues is the encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which Pope Francis collected and creatively completed the statements of his predecessors on environmental issues addressed to fellow believers and containing both scientific and religious argumentation. In most papal statements, we find biblical arguments providing the basis for a broader theological argument. Popes also refer to the rich tradition of the Church, especially to the person of St. Francis of Assisi. While describing the ecological crisis, they point to the moral crisis as its most basic cause. This, in turn, means that when looking for ways to overcome the ecological crisis, it is necessary to take into account its moral dimension (John Paul II 1990: No. 13, 15). Indicating ways to overcome the ecological crisis, popes often refer to typically religious motivation and emphasize the need to break with the ecological sin and the need for ecological conversion (Francis 2015: No. 8, 216-221; John Paul II 2001: No. 4).

Analysing religious arguments in favour of creation, it is impossible to ignore patristic thought, as well as the attitude

to nature developed in Celtic Christianity, in the monastic Benedictine tradition and Franciscan spirituality (Sadowski 2017; Sadowski 2019). All arguments advocating concern for creation derived from the rich tradition of the Church are efficiently serve the purpose of persuading Christians take more care of creation. These issues have been widely elaborated and the resulting studies are available, so they will not be mentioned in detail here.

3.2. Ecological involvement of the Church in Poland

Church documents in Poland raising the issue of ecology commonly refers to papal teaching and they show some similarities in the use of religious argumentation. The contribution of the Church in Poland in this respect is not unique, but it also draws on the wealth of thought presented by recent popes as well as practical implementation of those ideas carried out by other local churches. Referring to local environmental challenges, the Church in Poland identifies the ecological crisis, shows its genesis and indicates ways of overcoming it, taking into account the specificity of Polish religiosity. Statements on environmental issues made by official representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland can be divided into statements of the Polish Bishops' Conference, statements of a group of bishops and individual bishops. The Polish Bishops' Conference addressed the faithful about ecological problems twice by publishing two pastoral letters devoted directly to this topic. Polish Bishops' Conference expressed itself on ecological issues for the first time on May 2, 1989 and for the second time on October 4, 2018.

Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the *Pastoral Letter on Environmental Protection* of May 2, 1989. Polish Catholic bishops addressed both their fellow believers and all people of good will living in Poland. Bishops pointed out that they decided to take up the subject of ecological threats in Poland in the face

of the fact that the question has become extremely serious and urgent. In their opinion, ecological threats can pose a serious risk to the very foundations of the nation's existence. The letter presents the ecological situation of Poland, especially highlighting the dramatic environmental damage in mining regions. The bishops point to the moral dimension of human attitude to nature and, referring to religious motivations, remind about the obligation of responsible management as regards the heritage entrusted to man by the Creator. They also point out that the pivotal source of environmental threats is the desire for profit accompanied by the thirst for power, which are manifested in selfishness leading to disregard for the rights or the needs of others. The bishops also indicate that the environmental crisis had its sources in ideologically motivated decisions of the authorities with respect to the adopted model of the economy which did not take into account Poland's natural conditions. In addition, they placed responsibility for the current state of the environment in Poland on all the society, including both authorities, social groups and individuals, depending on their means to influence the decisions taken in this respect (Polish Bishops' Conference 1989).

Polish bishops point to religious ways of solving the growing environmental problem. They express a conviction that a spiritual change is necessary in order to recognize this evil, acknowledge the guilt and take appropriate corrective action. Spiritual transformation thus seems to be the only way to prepare the ground for unavoidable sacrifices, which are a prerequisite in our attempts to overcome the ecological crisis.

Apart from undergoing a spiritual transformation, it is also necessary to rethink the economic model, which in its current shape does not harmonize with Poland's natural conditions. Bishops openly speak about the need to abandon

further expansion of heavy industry and to commence gradual elimination of its destructive impact on the environment, and if it is not possible, then its consistent liquidation. In addition, bishops point out the need for equal treatment of business entities as regards their participation in environmental pollution. In the context of environmental protection, international cooperation is also necessary, which will help coordinate the activities of many countries for the protection of nature (Polish Bishops' Conference 1989).

Unfortunately, this letter did not bring about the expected effects, which was due to the political situation in the country. The letter was read in all Polish churches on Sunday, June 11, 1989, while on June 4 and 18, the first and second round of the first, partly democratic parliamentary elections in Poland took place. Under the so-called Polish Round Table Agreement as a result of these elections, the communist party agreed to transfer power to Polish society. At that time, the situation in the country was so tense and the public opinion was so focused on socio-political changes that it took many years before a reflection on the ecological message of this letter was undertaken in retrospect. Unfortunately, this reflection was of limited scope and concerned a rather narrow group of specialists. Consequently, the bishops' letter failed to produce the expected effect of widespread awakening of Poles' ecological awareness.

The second letter of Polish Bishops' Conference on environmental issues entitled "Out of Concern for Our Common Home" was sent to the faithful on October 4, 2018, on the occasion of the liturgical memorial of St. Francis of Assisi. This letter directly refers to the encyclical *Laudato si'* and, as it might be assumed, it is aimed at propagating the key ideas of this encyclical among Polish Catholics. The bishops remind that the Creator called man to live in union with other creatures and made him responsible for the entire creation. Human right to use the earth's resources given to man by God

as described in Genesis, is unfortunately often abused. The reason behind this is human egoism, which leads to excessive exploitation of goods and irresponsible management of the heritage entrusted to people. The bishops highlight the specifics of ecological challenges in Poland pointing to air pollution as particularly dangerous for the health and life of Poles. They also indicate that out of 55 European cities with the most polluted air, as many as 33 cities are in Poland, and the annual list of deaths associated with it reaches almost 40 thousand. The bishops express their hope for social agreement leading to common involvement of all levels of government and self-government administration as well as all people of good will in the development and effective implementation of air protection programs at national, regional and local levels. The bishops, noting the insufficient effectiveness of legal norms, refer to religious arguments and point to the need for everyone's universal commitment to air protection (Polish Bishops' Conference 2018).

Referring to the concept of Pope Francis' integral ecology, Polish bishops indicate the relationship between concern for the environment and concern for man. They note that Poland is still facing the ecological effects of communist rule, and that next to those past environmental challenges new ones have now emerged. An irrepressible desire for profit, accompanied by simultaneous lack of imagination, pushes some to treat Poland as a garbage dump of Europe, exposing people and animals to the ensuing damaging effects. The bishops point to the responsibility of those in power to fight climate change. They indicate that it is necessary to limit the use of fossil fuels, develop renewable energy sources and provide education in the area of energy saving. In addition, they draw attention to individual responsibility for the modern ecological crisis and encourage a change of lifestyle. They emphasize, however, that this crisis has its roots in human gradual

departure from God, which consequently leads to man's departure from creation resulting in ecological sins and developing the so called "culture of rejection" mentality according to which the lives of man or that of other creatures are no longer perceived as values. Following the example of Pope Francis, Polish bishops refer to religious arguments when indicating the ways to overcome ecological challenges. As one of such methods, they recommend ecological conversion. The deepening of love for the Creator leads to the deepening of love for man, to the brotherly love felt towards all living beings and the issuing self-denial related to a simple lifestyle (Polish Bishops' Conference 2018).

In addition to the statements of the Polish Bishops' Conference, bishops from ecologically vulnerable regions also addressed messages to their dioceses regarding environmental challenges. A good example here is the message issued by bishops from the Silesian Province, i.e. representatives of the Archdiocese of Katowice, the Diocese of Gliwice, the Diocese of Opole and the Diocese of Sosnowiec. Describing environmental challenges, they referred to religious arguments in addition to recalling commonly known scientific data.

The letter of Silesian bishops revolves around the region's most sensitive environmental problem, namely, air pollution resulting from dust and harmful gas emissions mainly from coal-fired boiler plants and household stoves. The main reason for this is the combustion of low-quality coal and easy-to-burn waste in household stoves. The level of air pollution during the heating period in the most densely populated area of Poland several times exceeds the permissible norms. Hence, the bishops' appeal to both government and local authorities as well as individual families urging the government to introduce nationwide assistance programs aimed at helping to replace outdated heating installations and ensuring high quality

fuel. The bishops also turn to local authorities participate in these programs, work towards removing bureaucratic barriers and try to assist people in taking advantage of programs implemented by the government. While addressing individual persons, they emphasize the moral dimension of irresponsible behaviour that leads to “small-scale ecological disasters” (Web-06).

One of the first statements made by the hierarchs of the Catholic Church in Poland about environmental protection was the pastoral letter of Archbishop Damian Zimoń from Katowice from September 28, 1986. In his letter, Bishop Zimoń highlights the catastrophic ecological state of the Silesian Province, listing the most serious problems faced by the inhabitants of this region, such as air pollution, lack of water, soil contamination, mining damage, the landscape abounding in dead mine heaps, dying forests due to acid rain and poisoned rivers. All this negatively affects the health and life of the inhabitants of Silesia. Bishop Zimoń, moreover, draws attention to the moral dimension of the ecological crisis and calls for steps being taken to improve the environment in that region. Recipients of this appeal include five categories of professions: 1) educators, teachers, priests and catechists; 2) progress initiators, i.e. people of the world of science and technology; 3) organizers of economic and social life; 4) industry workers; 5) farmers. Each of these groups is invited to take action, in accordance with their competences and within their capabilities, to stop irresponsible management of natural resources or at least eliminate its damaging effects (Zimoń 1986).

The statements made by Catholic hierarchs in Poland are not confined to letters and appeals. Environmental issues are frequently addressed in homilies and during numerous public appearances (Web-07). References to religious arguments for the protection of environment can also be noticed in the joint initiatives undertaken

by various Christian churches in Poland. An example of such an activity is the initiative to pray for the protection of the created world. Established by Pope Francis in 2015, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation has provided an opportunity for ecumenical prayer of Polish Christians for creation. On September 9, 2017, this prayer gathered representatives of Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical and Old Catholic Mariavite communities in Płock. Gathered in prayer, representatives of various Christian denominations jointly praised the Creator for the gift of creation and asked for help in developing a more responsible approach to nature (Web-08).

Appealing to religious arguments regarding environmental issues is not limited to statements made by Catholic hierarchs. Secular Catholics in Poland are also eager to engage in pro-environmental activities, and their ecological motivations are often strengthened by religious beliefs. A good example of this was the organization of the ecological village of *Laudato si'* during the World Youth Day in Krakow (26-29.07.2016). The event was organized by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, an organization of Catholic ecologists from Poland called St. Francis of Assisi Environmental Movement and Catholic environmentalists from Austria, the Philippines, Brazil, USA, Kenya and many other countries (Web-09).

Another important ecological initiative combining the efforts of Polish lay Catholics and official representatives of the Church was support offered for the participants of the COP 24 Climate Summit in Katowice in December 2018. Two months before the Climate Summit, an ecumenical delegation meeting was held for representatives of European Catholic bishops, the European Christian Ecological Network, the World Council of Churches and Act Alliance Europe. The purpose of this meeting was to coordinate activities and lobbying for the adoption by COP delegates of solutions that will effectively contribute to overcoming the climate crisis (Web-10).

The planned activities included, among others, Holy Mass for Catholics who participated in COP 24 during which Archbishop Skworc, referring to Pope Francis' idea of integral ecology, encouraged those gathered there to make ambitious decisions. Another interesting initiative was the creation of the COP 24 Spiritual Zone. That event held in the spirit of the *Laudato Si'* included organization of prayers and pilgrimages for the work of creation as well as discussion panels and scientific conferences aimed at answering, from the perspective of believers, Pope Francis' appeal for the protection of the world which is our common home (Web-11). Another example of reference to religious arguments for the environment was the "Anti-smog appeal of Catholic environmentalists in Krakow," which was promoted under the slogan "You are a responsible Catholic, do not be indifferent" (Web-12).

Particularly noteworthy in this respect was a social campaign carried out in 2010 on Polish Television entitled "Don't litter your conscience". The campaign organized by the Ministry of the Environment focused on shaping environmentally friendly behaviour regarding garbage. It was particularly aimed at making the public aware of the harmfulness of burning garbage in home furnaces, removing garbage to the forest, and neglect of sorting home waste. TVP repeatedly broadcast three 30-second videos in which a priest makes parishioners aware that their everyday waste management constitutes an "ecological sin" (Web-13). This campaign unambiguously confirms that religious beliefs are an important reference point for everyday choices of most Poles and constitute a great, but still insufficiently used ecological potential. This social campaign can certainly be considered a great success in awakening ecological awareness and in making people realize the moral dimension of behaviour towards nature.

Conclusion

Statements made by various popes at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries on environmental issues clearly show the need to care for the condition of our planet. They also indicate that it is the responsibility of all people, and this responsibility specifically rests with Christians, since they received from the Creator a command to care for creation and manage the heritage entrusted to them in a way that would allow to satisfy human needs while taking into account nature's capabilities.

This study presents a wide range of religious arguments used in the ecological debate of Polish Christians. In their attempts to understand the complex phenomenon of the ecological crisis, they refer to both biblical arguments and Catholic social teaching, also drawing on the rich tradition of the Church, which has a lot to offer in this regard.

Polish Christians invoke the experience of the universal Church referring to the patristic tradition, to Celtic Christianity, unique in its attitude to nature, as well as to the developed traditions of religious life. The Franciscan and Benedictine traditions are particularly promising in the field of the environment by their rich potential to provide inspiration for specific initiatives for the environment. The activities of Polish Christians in this area are clearly intensifying. This can be seen both in the statements of the official representatives of the Church in Poland as well as in the activity of religious communities and movements or Polish ecological organizations with Christian provenance.

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Rola argumentacji religijnej w kształtowaniu prośrodowiskowych postaw chrześcijan w Polsce

Streszczenie

Argumenty religijne stanowią ważny czynnik wpływający na codzienne wybory ludzi. Wybory te skutkują, m.in. względem środowiska przyrodniczego i przyczyniają się do polepszenia lub pogorszenia jego kondycji. Artykuł ten stawia sobie za cel ukazanie ekologicznego potencjału argumentacji religijnej Polaków oraz ukazanie stosowanych argumentów wynikających z wyznawanej wiary. Ponadto opracowanie to wskazuje argumentację religijną użytą w wypowiedziach oficjalnych przedstawicieli Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce na tematy środowiskowe oraz przykłady motywowanych religijnie działań świeckich chrześcijan na rzecz środowiska.

Słowa kluczowe

kryzys ekologiczny, chrześcijaństwo, argumentacja religijna, Polska, religia i ekologia

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