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United by the same concern Ecumenical impulses of Pope Francis in the context of integral ecology

Abstract

One of the important tasks of the Church in the temporal order are concern for the work of creation and for man himself, and sometimes even the defense against threats of technical progress, conducted from any ethical and moral references. The concern for the common home is not only a domain of the Catholic Church. Similarly, other churches and Christian communities as well as other world religions reflect on the issues relating to the degradation of human and natural environment. Thus, the aim of these reflections is an attempt to recognize ecumenical impulses of the Pope Francis in the context of integral ecology that takes into account the interlinkages between different dimensions of reality. Therefore, during the considerations will be presented firstly the papal diagnosis of the social and ecological crisis (1), then the proposals of actions aiming at the development of integral ecology (2) as well as an invitation to a dialogue resulting from the care for the common home (3). The main sources of the analysis undertaken are the two papal documents, namely the encyclical *Laudato si'* (LS) and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (QA).

Keywords: encyclical *Laudato si'*, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, integral ecology, ecumenical dialogue.

Zjednoczeni wspólną troską Ekumeniczne impulsy papieża Franciszka w kontekście ekologii integralnej

Abstrakt

Jednym z istotnych zadań Kościoła w porządku doczesnym jest troska o dzieło stworzenia i samego człowieka, a czasami wręcz obrona ludzkości przed zagrożeniami, wyzwolonego od jakichkolwiek odniesień etyczno-moralnych, postępu technicznego. Troska o wspólny dom nie jest tylko domeną Kościoła katolickiego, również inne Kościoły i wspólnoty chrześcijańskie – podobnie jak i inne religie, dokonują refleksji nad zagadnieniami związanymi z degradacją środowiska ludzkiego i naturalnego (*Laudato si'*, 7). Celem artykułu jest próba dostrzeżenia i analizy ekumenicznych impulsów papieża Franciszka w kontekście całościowej ekologii, uwzględniającej wzajemne powiązania różnych wymiarów rzeczywistości. Dlatego w trakcie rozważań są prezentowane: najpierw papieska diagnoza kryzysu społeczno-ekologicznego (1); propozycje działań ukierunkowanych na rozwój ekologii integralnej (2), a następnie zaproszenie do dialogu w trosce o wspólny dom (3). Podstawą

dla prowadzonych analiz są dwa papieskie dokumenty: encyklika *Laudato si'* (LS) i posynodalna adhortacja apostołska *Querida Amazonia* (QA).

Słowa kluczowe: encyklika *Laudato si'*, posynodalna adhortacja apostołska *Querida Amazonia*, ekologia integralna, dialog ekumeniczny.

The latest exhortation of Pope Francis titled *Querida Amazonia* (2020) is another document, after the encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015), presenting the prosocial and proecological attitude of the Church. Both the documents indicate inextricable ties between man and environment. In those bonds one can see the intention of the Pope to address all the people of the good will and invite them to common talks and actions. The concern for the common home is not only a domain of the Catholic Church. Similarly, other churches and Christian communities as well as other religions, as Francis states, reflect on the issues relating to the degradation of human and natural environment (LS, 7). Therefore, resuming discussions is not voluntary anymore, but by the Pope it is considered as an imperative. “In an Amazonian region characterized by many religions, we believers – states the Pope – need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor” (QA, 106). The resumption of talks gives the possibility to create new areas for ecumenical and interreligious coexistence of different churches and Christian communities and religious united around the common concern (LS, 7)¹. Thus, the aim of the undertaken reflections, the title of which refers to the words of Pope Francis, is an attempt to recognize ecumenical impulses of the Pope in the context of integral ecology that takes into account the interlinkages between different dimensions of reality. The main source of the conducted analyses are the two papal documents, namely the encyclical *Laudato si'* (LS) and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (QA). In the deliberations the papal diagnosis of the social and ecological crisis will first be presented (1) and then also the proposals of actions aiming at the development of integral ecology (2) as well as an invitation to a dialogue resulting from the care for the common home (3).

¹ See Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Stellungnahme zur Öko-Enzyklika: Ein Text zum richtigen Zeitpunkt* (20.03.2020). https://www.ekd.de/agu/themen/theologie_umweltethik/pm_2015_ratsvorsitzender_zur_encyklika.html; Karl-Hinrich Manzke, *Stellungnahme zur Enzyklika Laudato si von Papst Franziskus des Catholica-Beauftragten der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD)* (20.03.2020). https://www.velkd.de/downloads/Stellungnahme_Manzke_-_Laudato_si_2015.pdf; Derk Harmannij, 2019. Is It Possible to Give Environmental Issues a More Prominent Role in Church Life?. In *Sustainability and the Humanities*. Ed. Walter Leal Filho, Adriana Consorte McCrea. Cham: Springer, 97–114. Anglican Communion Environmental Network, *The World is our Host. A call to urgent Action for Climate Justice* (10.04.2020). <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/The-World-is-our-Host-FINAL-TEXT.pdf>; Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, *Environment – churches and Christian organisations* (10.04.2020). <https://ctbi.org.uk/environment-churches-and-christian-organisations/#churches>.

1. The degradation of human and natural environment

Pope Francis diagnoses the degradation of human and natural environment on the basis of the analysis of environmental issues related to the pollution, global warming, lack of access to safe drinking water, or biodiversity loss. Analysing the above mentioned phenomena, the Pope indicates clearly their social implications. For instance, referring to research findings, among climate issues he points out the problems related to climate warming: “If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us” (LS, 24). The consequences of climate changes are apparent in ecological, social, economical, and political fields. Still, the greatest challenges are those faced by the poorest as their means of subsistence are most dependant on environmental resources (LS, 25). Climate changes disrupt the balance of ecosystems and lead to the loss of means of subsistence by the poor who inhabit them as well as force them to mass migrations resulting in turn in further social and political problems². Therefore, Francis does not recognize the separation of environmental and social issues, since uncontrolled climate changes always affect the poor (LS, 26). Social and ecological problems also result from water scarcity. “Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity” (30). The evident connections between ecological and social problems are even more highlighted by the Pope with regard to the region of Amazonia where “water is queen; the rivers and streams are like veins, and water determines every form of life” (QA, 43). In the description of the waters of the Amazon, the Pope attributes to them the functions of uniting, introducing harmony between the world of nature and people (QA, 44). Referring to one of the preparatory documents for the Amazon Synod (*Eje de Fronteras*, Tabatinga – Brasil (13th February, 2019), the Pope states: “the river does not divide us. It unites us and helps us live together amid different cultures and languages” (QA, 45).

Another form of the degradation of natural environment is related to biodiversity decline that leads to the degradation of ecosystem services. Such a situation has social implications as well. Biodiversity loss results in reducing possibilities of feeding humanity, managing based on the resources of living nature, treating, and using other environmental services (LS, 34). Analysing the environmental issues such as the loss of tropical forests, the decline of coastal forests (LS, 39), threatened ocean biodiversity, overexploitation of living resources (LS, 40), pol-

² See Ryszard Feliks Sadowski. 2017. “Wpływ zjawisk społecznych na współczesny kryzys ekologiczny w świetle encykliki *Laudato si*”. *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 15 (1): 17.

lution (LS, 41), the Pope always takes into account their social implications³. For instance, overconsumption of some societies often becomes the source of growing poverty for others and renders impossible finding a solution to the problem of poverty (LS, 27), the lack of access to drinking water or its poor quality is the source of illnesses and mortality of numerous indigent people; overexploitation of living resources constitutes a danger for many societies for whom they are the source of subsistence (LS, 40); the devastation in the functioning of the ecosystems of the Amazon region has a direct impact on the quality of life or even survival of particular people (QA, 49).

The separation of social and ecological problems leads to global injustice⁴. One of the examples is the issue of an ecological debt (LS, 51) that is owed by the countries of the rich North to poor countries by degrading their natural environment and overexploiting their natural resources. Still, the process of exploitation, as the Pope notices, has not finished since concerns having their headquarters and owners in rich countries realise robbery economy in developing countries which frequently results in the devastation of human and natural environment (LS, 51). The issue of justice and the ecological issue are two sides of the same coin. Thus, “a true ecological approach – as the Pope states – always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS, 49).

Analysing different causes of the degradation of human and natural environment, Pope Francis attaches particular importance to the domination of the techno-economic paradigm. The domination does not only consist in man’s dominion over nature or man’s dominion over man. Such a way of conduct leads to shaping a kind of paradigm which “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation” (LS, 106). Such a situation renders impossible forming the man’s relation to nature, characteristic in the past, since often things or the goods of nature are merely exploited. The contemporary technical progress aims at unlimited growth which „is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit” (LS, 106). Technology focused on possession is not satisfied only with dominion over

³ See Barbara Żarska. 2017. “Kwestie przyrodnicze w encyklice *Laudato si’* Ojca Świętego Franciszka”. *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 15 (1): 44–47.

⁴ See Donal Dorr. 2016. *Option for the Poor and for the Earth. From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*. Maryknoll (NY): Orbis, 49; Bogusław Drożdż. 2015. „Ekologiczne potknięcie się świata – refleksja w świetle encykliki *Laudato si’*”. *Perspectiva. Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne* 14 (1): 35.

nature, but also affects social, economical, or political dimension (LS, 107). It is a profit that has a measurable value to it, regardless the effects in the form of the devastation of nature or growing poverty of whole societies because of their exclusion⁵. That is why the products of technology are not neutral. They influence lifestyle and also not seldom they determine the directions of development of particular societies according to the interests of specific groups in power⁶. The methodology used in technology strives to have control over the whole reality: “Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic” (LS, 108). Aspirations of that kind are recognized by the Pope as unjustified and dangerous for the integral human development and social integration (LS, 109). In particular, he criticizes the attitude of relativism in the name of which rich countries depreciate the rights of poor countries to development. Such logic of actions, supporting the interests of the rich, strengthens different attitudes that cause degradation of natural and social environment at the same time (LS, 122). Reducing progress to economical dimension does not contribute to the proper level of production of goods, better distribution of wealth, and care for nature and the rights of future generations because gaining more and more profits constitutes a value (QA, 58). Therefore, the Pope demands greater involvement in searching for integral solutions that would take into account the interlinkages between natural and social systems. “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (LS, 139).

The papal criticism is not directed against technology itself, but only against all uncontrolled forms of technical progress, reductionist approaches to reality that harm the work of creation and human life. Taking into account only the aspect of efficiency and immediate economic benefits as well as separation of progress from any ethical references becomes not only the cause of the degradation of human and natural environment but an obstacle to integral ecology.

2. Measures in favour of integral ecology

The diagnosis concerning the degradation of natural and human environment out of necessity requires to be complemented with appropriate actions. “An interdependent world – the Pope states – not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption

⁵ Thomas Wieland. 2016. “Laudato si’ praktisch”. Herder Korrespondenz 70 (11): 49.

⁶ See Andrzej Anderwald. 2019. “W poszukiwaniu nowej idei postępu technicznego. Perspektywa teologiczna”. *Teologia i Człowiek* 45 (1): 55.

which affect us all [...] Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan” (LS, 164). That is the reason why the Pope postulates a new model of development that is based on intergenerational solidarity that is the foundation for building sustainable development. The realization of that postulate demands a radical change of the model of development preferring only profit of chosen social groups and disregarding the needs of others. Except for intergenerational solidarity also intragenerational solidarity is significant (LS, 162). The latter is exemplified with the papal call to urban communities in the Amazon “which ought to come up with creative and generous ways, especially on the outskirts, to be close and welcoming to families and young people who arrive from the interior” (QA, 98). It should be noted that, according to Francis, solidarity with the excluded is not limited only to persons. The attitude of openness of heart proclaimed by him leads to common fraternal communion from which nothing and nobody can be excluded: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (LS, 92). The element of communion between people and communion with nature is even more evident in his considerations about the life of the peoples of Amazonia. “Their relationships – the Pope writes – are steeped in the surrounding nature, which they feel and think of as a reality that integrates society and culture, and a prolongation of their bodies, personal, familial and communal” (QA, 20).

Another area of corrective actions that can diminish global warming as well as contribute to departing from compulsive consumption (LS, 203) is connected by the Pope with educational activities in order to shape explicit prosocial and pro-environmental habits (LS, 209). Specifically, it is a question of social and ecological education whose aim is to motivate and educate to small everyday actions that foster shaping a different lifestyle. Such education both can lead to the formation of deeper motivations that refer to love for others and nature as well as support in education to responsibility for natural environment, solidarity with the needy, or to asceticism (LS, 213). “An integral ecology – the Pope teaches – cannot be content simply with fine-tuning technical questions or political, juridical and social decisions. The best ecology always has an educational dimension that can encourage the development of new habits in individuals and groups” (QA, 58).

In addition to already undertaken legal and political initiatives aimed at the protection of nature against further devastation and contributing to its regeneration also all the activities that contribute to the protection of nature ethically and morally seem to be essential. Man as a moral being should be aware of his moral responsibility for the surrounding reality. “A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop – the Pope claims – unless

people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal” (QA, 58). The Pope indicates that the practical contribution of theology, including theology of spirituality, could consist in educating man to the responsibility for environment expressing in behaviours such as reducing water consumption, segregating waste, using public transport, or planting trees (LS, 211). Above all, however, the contribution of Christian spirituality to overcoming the socio-ecological crisis consists in teaching man responsible asceticism that is specifically expressed in the habits of saving and self-limiting and also constitutes an effective way of the results of egoism, hedonism, or consumerism. From the perspective of Christian anthropology, attitudes of that kind are always a practical answer to the particular negative consequences of technical civilization such as overconsumption, waste, environmental pollution, thoughtlessness, or robbery management of raw materials. According to Francis, in order to develop such attitudes ecological conversion is necessary (LS, 216–221). “This conversion – the Pope teaches – calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works [...] By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems” (LS, 220). It should be noted that the Pope assigns an important role in awakening deeper motivations to concern about the natural and human environment not only to Christianity but also in general to all religious traditions that emphasize respect towards creation. “We need to take up an ancient lesson – the Pope writes – found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that «less is more»” (LS, 222)⁷. Religious traditions support the spiritual formation of their faithful which eventually fosters the recognition of the primacy of “being” over “having”⁸. To Christian spirituality the Pope attributes particular significance in promoting the attitudes of self-control, love of simplicity, or humility that help man liberate himself from “the self-interested pragmatism” (LS, 215), “the cult of appearances” (LS, 225), or “the indifference induced by consumerism” (LS, 232) and leads him to a “universal fraternity” (LS, 228) and a “culture of care” (LS, 231). The aforementioned attitudes and the related spiritual values express the openness to a different lifestyle as well as socio-ecological conversion of man in which a specific concern about the common home is expressed. A special place

⁷ See Grzegorz Ryś. 2018. “Wszystko jest ze sobą powiązane. Ekologiczna encyklika społeczna Franciszka”. *Więź* 672 (2): 111–112.

⁸ See Sadowski. 2017. “Wpływ zjawisk społecznych na współczesny kryzys ekologiczny w świetle encykliki *Laudato si*”, 24.

is assigned by the Pope to the community of the Church which “with her broad spiritual experience, her renewed appreciation of the value of creation, her concern for justice, her option for the poor, her educational tradition and her history of becoming incarnate in so many different cultures throughout the world, also desires to contribute to the protection and growth” (QA, 60).

3. An invitation to a dialogue (ecumenical and interreligious)

Pope Francis’ diagnosis concerning the socio-ecological crisis as well as the postulated measures in favour of holistic ecology are not addressed only to members of the Catholic Church. Therefore, in his encyclical *Laudato si’* the Pope addresses all the inhabitants of the Earth with his proposal of undertaking a dialogue “with all people about our common home” (LS, 3). Similarly, in the exhortation *Querida Amazonia* the Pope requests all the world “to help awaken their affection and concern for that land which is also «ours», and to invite them to value it and acknowledge it as a sacred mystery” (QA, 5). The aim is to invite everyone to common actions and reflections on „some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (LS, 137). Thus, in both documents, the Pope cites not only the Bible and the texts of the papal and universal teaching of the Church but also refers widely to the documents of regional and national episcopal conferences of all continents. Such an approach is not only an expression of his appreciation for various activities and experiences of local churches but it is also essential to conduct a context analysis of the studied socio-ecological problems. The Pope, referring in his analyses to the non-ecclesial documents shows that the Magisterium of the Church is open to indications from the representatives of specific sciences, philosophy and theology as well as from social organizations to be able to speak competently about the challenges of the ecological crisis (LS, 7). For that reason the Pope quotes directly from secular documents such as the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) or *The Earth Charter* published in The Hague (2000) and also refers indirectly to the report *Our common future* issued by the *World Commission on Environment and Development* (LS, 141). That shows that Pope Francis presents the Catholic Church not as isolated from the world and focused on herself but well incorporated into earthly realities. On one hand, the Church in her activities tries to remember not only about the obligation to care for nature but also about the protection of man (LS, 79). On the other hand, conscious of her nature she respects the justified autonomy of earthly realities (LS, 80). Recognition of these conditions creates the basis for starting a dialogue with everyone out of concern for a common home. The recognition of those conditions creates

the basis to undertake a dialogue with everyone out of concern for the common home. The Pope sends a clear signal that without a universal dialogue and cooperation of various individual and group entities it is not possible to overcome the current environmental and social crisis.

In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, paying attention to the interlinkages and interdependencies taking place in the world, the Pope indicates the need of a dialogue on different levels. Conducting it in a reliable way should result in the development of new understanding of economics and progress that would not be only profit-oriented but would lead to economic growth and at the same time the improved quality of life in general (LS, 194). The Pope directly lists five thematic circles of the dialogue: on the environment in the international community (LS, 164–175); for new national and local policies (LS, 176–181); for transparency in decision-making (LS, 182–188); politics and economy for human fulfilment (LS, 189–198); religions with science (LS, 199–201). Similarly, in the exhortation *Querida Amazonia* the Pope clearly invites to a social dialogue for which the natural and human environment of Amazonia is its place and the indigenous peoples are its participants (QA, 26). The poor and excluded should be significant partners in the dialogue without which building of integral ecology is not possible. “Dialogue must not only favour the preferential option on behalf of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded – the Pope demands – but also respect them as having a leading role to play. Others must be acknowledged and esteemed precisely *as others*, each with his or her own feelings, choices and ways of living and working” (QA, 27).

Taking into account the religious point of view in the ongoing dialogue is particularly important in the perspective of striving for the development of a holistic concept of ecology. “It cannot be maintained – the Pope notices – that empirical science provides a complete explanation of life, the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality. This would be to breach the limits imposed by its own methodology. [...] It would be quite simplistic to think that ethical principles present themselves purely in the abstract, detached from any context. Nor does the fact that they may be couched in religious language detract from their value in public debate” (LS, 199). From the perspective of Christian anthropology, such a dialogue appears as a precondition to realize a new idea of technological progress that would take into account interdisciplinary activities aimed at a fuller understanding of the truth about man, the surrounding world, and the relations between them. In his reflections on a dialogue itself, Francis sees in it rather an opportunity for common talks than a threat to own identity. “and dialogue are not enemies. Our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves. Nor is our authentic identity preserved by an impoverished isolation. Far be it from

me to propose a completely enclosed, a-historic, static «indigenism» that would reject any kind of blending” (QA, 37). Such a dialogue contributes to developing both a new way of thinking and acting of a global character that take into account the interests of future generations, thinking that highlights all human needs and values including esthetical, cultural, and religious ones. The dialogue also enables to find comprehensive answers.

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue inspired by the Pope appears to be particularly significant for our considerations. In the encyclical *Laudato si'* Pope Francis explicitly mentions Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I who is widely known for his commitment to the protection of creation. In the documents quoted by the Pope in footnotes, Patriarch Bartholomew repeatedly calls for repentance for the lack of care for the planet and the recognition of sins against creation (LS, 8) as well as indicates ethical and spiritual causes of ecological problems related, among others, to overconsumption or greed (LS, 9). Interesting also is the reference to the master of Islamic Sufism Ali Al-Khawwas in whose thought, quoted in the footnote 159, the Pope finds similarity to the teaching of Saint Bonaventure (LS, 233). For Christians, the conduction of interreligious dialogue is important in the context of multireligious communities as it takes place in the areas of Amazonia where “believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor” (QA, 106).

In addition to the direct inspirations for the dialogue in the ecumenical or interreligious perspective, there are, especially in the encyclical *Laudato si'*, numerous indirect impulses that can also be read as a specific invitation to ecumenical dialogue. Though the encyclical lacked references to the social and ecological teaching of Protestant churches, its contents were favourably received by the two main Protestant churches in Germany, namely the German Evangelical Church (EKD) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD). Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Chair of the Council of the German Evangelical Church, regards the contents of the encyclicals as significant for the future of the whole humanity and the planet Earth. Christian churches around the world should cooperate in their fight against the destruction of nature which was entrusted to man as God’s creation. Therefore, commitment to the global protection of climate is a shared responsibility of all Christian churches⁹. Bedford-Strohm assesses positively, also repeatedly referred to by Pope Francis, the close interlinkages of social and environmental issues in the light of integrally understood ecology¹⁰. Such an approach to ecol-

⁹ Bedford-Strohm, *Stellungnahme zur Öko-Enzyklika*.

¹⁰ Bedford-Strohm, *Stellungnahme zur Öko-Enzyklika*.

ogy is also characteristic for the Protestant churches and at the same time it determines important topics for a common dialogue on the shape of socially and ecologically sensitive market economy¹¹. The Pope's call for a dialogue that goes beyond confessional and religious borders is also noticed by Bishop Karl-Hinrich Manzke from the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. The whole text of the encyclical is understood by him as an invitation and impulse for a new dialogue and common actions. In the commentary to the encyclical he praises its contents not only in its theological or ethical dimension but also at the level of references to specialist knowledge¹². Among papal impulses that require to be undertaken in further discussions, he first mentions emphasized by the Pope an inextricable linkage that exists between man's attitude to nature and the culture of human coexistence. The current environmental problems are not only a negative side effect of the processes of technological and economic progress but they express the global cultural crisis as well. Therefore, solutions to those problems should be sought not only at the level of science or technology, but they also require the inner transformation of man himself. That is why Manzke in the papal call for "profound interior conversion" (LS, 217) sees another specific topic for joint ecumenical activities¹³. As inspiring for joint ecumenical initiatives, Manzke lists also issues such as concern for solidarity culture, shaping political responsibility for the socio-ecological future, building the holistic concept of ecology, and developing common theology of creation¹⁴.

Ecumenical scientific contributions by Catholic and Protestant theologians inspired by the ecological teaching of Pope Francis are also worth noticing. For instance, Catholic professor of systematic theology Bogdan Ferdek comparing the eco-dogmatics of the encyclical *Laudato si'* to the eco-dogmatics contained in the works of Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann, indicates ecumenical concordance between them¹⁵. Both the concepts of eco-dogmatics agreeably recognize the existence of harmony at the beginning of the relation between God, man, and other co-creation¹⁶. Such ecumenical eco-dogmatics is an answer to the challenge which for theology is the ecological crisis. According to Ferdek, it also constitutes a significant contribution to scientific ecumenism. Not only does being united by common concern for environmental protection integrates Christians at the level of practical ecumenism, but also the

¹¹ Bedford-Strohm, *Stellungnahme zur Öko-Enzyklika*.

¹² Manzke, *Stellungnahme zur Enzyklika Laudato si von Papst Franziskus*, 1.

¹³ Manzke, *Stellungnahme zur Enzyklika Laudato si von Papst Franziskus*, 1.

¹⁴ Manzke, *Stellungnahme zur Enzyklika Laudato si von Papst Franziskus*, 2.

¹⁵ See Bogdan Ferdek. 2015. "Eko-dogmatyka encykliki Laudato si'". *Studia Oecumenica* 15: 5–19.

¹⁶ Ferdek. 2015. "Eko-dogmatyka encykliki Laudato si'", 12.

doctrine in the form of ecumenical eco-dogmatics can unite Christians at the level of scientific ecumenism contrary to the popular opinion that a doctrine divides and practice unites¹⁷.

The ecumenical potential of the encyclical has also been noticed by Evangelical professor of systematic theology Torsten Meireis¹⁸. From the perspective of the Protestant social ethics, Meireis finds numerous subjects that are significant for ecumenical discussions and have been already addressed within the Ecumenical Council of Churches or the Evangelical Church in Germany¹⁹. As currently important for ecumenical debates, Meireis lists the following topics: care for sustainable development of society, addressing ecological problems in relation to social problems, associating the issues of poverty with social justice, recognizing the links between economic and political power and the ecological crisis, the necessity of structural changes in politics and international economy²⁰. Besides, in similarities between Pope Francis' care for appropriate culture of sustainable development and the current debate in the Protestant theology concerning that issue Meireis sees an opportunity to initiate ecumenical dialogue²¹.

From the perspective of the Orthodox Church, the ecumenical meaning of the encyclical has been recognized by John Zizioulas, ecumenical Metropolitan from Pergamon²². The ecumenical impulse of the papal teaching is interpreted by the Orthodox Metropolitan as a call to divided Christians to undertake joint actions aimed at overcoming the ecological crisis²³. Fundamental existential problems including the degradation of human and natural environment require joint activities of interconfessional character.

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One of the crucial tasks of Christianity in the temporal order is care for the work of creation and man himself and sometimes even their defence against

¹⁷ Ferdek. 2015. "Eko-dogmatyka encykliki Laudato si'", 18.

¹⁸ See Torsten Meireis. 2015. "Ein klares Wort zur rechten Zeit. Die päpstliche Enzyklika Laudato si' in protestantischer Sicht". Amosinternational. Internationale Zeitschrift für christliche Sozialethik 9 (4): 36–44.

¹⁹ Meireis. 2015. "Ein klares Wort zur rechten Zeit. Die päpstliche Enzyklika Laudato si' in protestantischer Sicht", 37.

²⁰ Meireis. 2015. "Ein klares Wort zur rechten Zeit. Die päpstliche Enzyklika Laudato si' in protestantischer Sicht", 38.

²¹ Meireis. 2015. "Ein klares Wort zur rechten Zeit. Die päpstliche Enzyklika Laudato si' in protestantischer Sicht", 39.

²² See John Zizioulas, *A Comment on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si' by Elder Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon* (16.03.2020). <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/a-comment-on-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si->.

²³ Zizioulas, *A Comment on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si' by Elder Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon*.

threats from technological progress liberated from any ethical and moral references. Pope Francis has undertaken that current task in his encyclical *Laudato si'* as well as the exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, analyzing the social and economic crisis and postulating certain actions in the area of the protection of human and natural environment. The complexity and numerous conditions of the processes taking place both in social life and nature indicate quite clearly that when seeking solutions it is not possible to concentrate on environmental issues only, but the integral human-centred ecology is needed. The Pope warns against unilateral and simplified diagnoses of the ecological crisis in detachment from the social crisis as well as against the environmental activities that are not coupled with the promotion of integral development involving all people. The Pope criticizes the reductionist tendencies of the technological paradigm that ignore the mutual links between the various dimensions of reality, posing a threat to nature as well as man himself and interpersonal relations. All issues raised by the Pope are favourably received in the Orthodox Church and Protestant churches. Therefore, the teaching contained in both the papal documents is of great ecumenical significance. Developing today a new idea of technological progress, a new lifestyle, understanding of economics or international politics that take into account relations existing in the world also requires referring to spirituality of different Christian or religious traditions. Such reflection, out of necessity, should contemporarily be conducted taking into account the ecumenical and interreligious perspective (QA, 106–110). First of all, however, it is a joint task for all mankind, including particularly the Christian community regardless of confession. That dimension of common care, uniting Christians, is aptly expressed by the words of the Orthodox Metropolitan John Zizioulas: “The threat posed to us by the ecological crisis similarly bypasses or transcends our traditional divisions. The danger facing our common home, the planet in which we live, is described in the Encyclical in a way leaving no doubt about the existential risk we are confronted with. This risk is common to all of us regardless of our ecclesiastical or confessional identities. Equally common must be our effort to prevent the catastrophic consequences of the present situation”²⁴.

²⁴ Zizioulas, *A Comment on Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si' by Elder Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon*.

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