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Respect for life as an ecological value

Introduction

The European culture is a synthesis of Christianity and humanism. It perceives a man as the most perfect being, which in terms of biology belongs to nature¹, and thanks to spirituality a person is the subject of rights announced on 10 December 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations in the Declaration of Human Rights "as a common, biggest purpose of all people and nations, so that they (...) aim, by teaching and educating to develop respect (...) of rights and freedoms". In the Declaration, the rights and duties are defined, which might prevent atrocities. It was announced that people are free and equal, they have the right of life, freedom and safety, no one may be enslaved or forced to serve, treated with cruelty, discriminated, arrested without order, retained or expelled from the country, nobody can interfere in other people's private lives, family lives or home issues, or correspondence. Every person has the right to legal protection, free movement and choice of a place to live within the limits of every state. Nobody may be deprived of his or her property, every person is entitled to the right of free thinking, consciousness and religion, the right to associate, right to work and to choose it freely, and irrespective of any difference every person is entitled to equal remuneration for the same work. Every human being is entitled to holiday and rest, to education and protection of moral and material profits resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic activity (compare Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, p. 15-16).

¹ In medical literature there are more and more scientific publications explain the influence on the environmental protection on the functioning of people in the scope of the symptoms of seasonal depression. See L. Pawłowski. (2004), Seasonal depression as an example of the impact of natural environment on a human being's psychological condition, in: Social ecology - psychological and environmental conditions of attitudes, Cracow: Stowarzyszenie Ekopsychologia, Jagiellonian University p. 141-43.

In consequence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights other documents appeared, such as: the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms - treaty prepared in the framework of the Council of Europe (compare the European Convention of Human Rights, 2000, p. 5) to serve with the idea support in the development of sensitive (humanistic) approach for human affairs, with recognition of respect for the value of life and personal identity, in actions transforming the social and environmental society (compare Suchodolski, Wojnar, 1990, p. 61).

Although dignified life is a value, which became a part of the heritage of the European Culture - a person's relation to environment has become a more general problem, namely a relation towards people's existence and the reality they live in (compare Michalik, 1989, p. 21). H. Skorowski emphasized that "person as the highest value is to be the subject of the new Europe, he or she should manifest their real value outside. It should be manifested by a morality of personal behavior" (Skorowski, 2010, p. 33). Personal and common responsibility for the created world concerns a relation between a person and environment. Personal dignity is the basis of the above. In the process of Christian education it serves shaping the attitude of responsibility for the creation of God, it is connected with ecological education, environmental protection of life (compare Zellma, 2007, p. 481), as a category indicating beings with specific properties living on Planet Earth. As already mentioned in this article a human being, by its bodily element is a part of nature and in the Christian culture it is understood as the perfect creation of God². M. Nowak, considering the uniqueness of a person's position in the Universe, explains that all human theories should aim at realism, and he defends himself against the dualistic concept, which changes the emphasis or its spiritual dimension (*homo spiritualis*), or biological or economic one (*homo biologicus oeconomicus*). Continuing this thought, M. Nowak reminded us that both positions are against the integral humanism presented by J. Maritain (compare Nowak, 2010, p. 51), who developed personalistic pedagogy.

It should be emphasized that because of the development level of the mind and the culture of social life - the source of the ecological crisis in

² As a relation of human being - God.

a society is a human being himself - his internal disruption, attention focused at material values” (Szafranski, 1993, p. 9). Making Earth serve, does not give any right to *homo sapiens* to thoughtlessly exploit nature, to destroy it, to make people and animals suffer. According to J. Plenkowski the reasons of disrupting the humanistic homeostasis are not only bad relations between people and nature, but also inappropriate (or even pathological) relations in social communities (compare Plenkowski, 2004, p. 17), which are shaped pursuant to the fashionable - in the general tendency of universal culture - consumer worldview, leading to existential emptiness (compare Piątek, 2001, p. 93). Among other things I. Kurlak emphasizes that the phenomenon of *mobbing* (especially in serious cases, which lead to a huge threat of a loss of health or even life) is a form of social pathology, which societies do not willingly admit because of a complex nature of this phenomenon, and which has a negative influence on various psycho-social aspects of functioning of a human being (compare Kurlak, 2010, p. 36) in the environment. On the other hand, H. Gajdamowicz put it in general that a contextual approach to post modernity is an interesting proposal for pedagogy, because it lets discuss the issues of the current education in the atmosphere of free exchange of thoughts, running a discourse, looking for educational solutions fitting a given epoch. The author assumed that treating the post modernist paradigm as the only appropriate one is unreasonable and detrimental (compare Gajdamowicz, 2010, p. 138). It may be added - in the scope of all fields of education, also ecological, accounting for the meaning of the concept of eco philosophy and sozology in the educational process of the 21 century (compare Dołęga, 2007, p. 63-90).

D. Kielczewski enumerates the following reasons of ecological crisis, dangerous perspective to society: cultural, scientific, economic, technological and direct (compare Kielczewski, 2001, p. 28), connected with so called „ethics” of *homo homini lupus*³ (social abuse and injustice). H. Skolimowski claims that the classical empiricism, the 19th century positivism and the

³ The concept of the world as a machine appeared thanks to the methodology of Rene Descartes, in the views of Izaak Newton, Thomas Hobbes („man is a wolf to a man”), in the concept of free market by Adama Smith and in the concept of class fighting by Karol Marx. According to A. Kalinowska, this black list may also contain the utopia of the 19/20th century - the scientism, which "promised" to a man the complete knowledge of nature and justified manipulations (such as genetic engineering). The following were the precursors of science as the most important value: August Comte, John Mill, Herbert Spencer. See. A. Kalinowska. (1993), *Ekologia – wybór przeszłości*, Warszawa: Editions Spotkania, p. 76.

20th century logical empiricism split the values and knowledge (putting knowledge much higher) and more intellectuals in the so called western world, because of respect towards rationalism and positive knowledge, they rely on ethical imperatives, such as: competitiveness, manipulation, maximum capacity and use, control, reification of the social and natural environment. Skolimowski explained that it is the effect of the modern idea of progress, mechanistic cosmology - of the world and the human being, similar to a machine. In his opinion a new quality of thinking should be created in ecological categories - the ecological awareness, transcendental, sacral, spiritual, on the foundation of the most supreme ecological value, which is respect for life, understood especially in the Franciscan sense. This value is entered in the whole shape of the spiritual heritage of the European culture and it constitutes a positive status of the tradition of thinking in ecological categories.

1. Respect for life in the ecological intuition of Saint Francis of Assisi

Skolimowski emphasised that the Christian ecological ethics should refer to the concept of Saint Francis of Assisi (Skolimowski, 1991, p. 20), because in his concept the ecological awareness has a spiritual, transcendental dimension (Skolimowski, 1993, p. 26). It is an attitude towards a wise, dignified, integral, modest life, when the ecological balance becomes a part of the balance of humanity in the living environment. The example may be the ethic catalog by Saint Francis of Assisi⁴, who was announced the patron of ecologists by St. John Paul II in 1979:

1. *Be a man among creatures, brother among brothers.*
2. *Treat all creations with love and respect.*
3. *The Earth has been entrusted to you - rule it with wisdom.*
4. *Care a bout a man, an animal, herb, water and earth so that the Earth may never be deprived of them.*
5. *Use things deliberately, because there is no future for profligacy.*

⁴ In Poland, since 1898, the ecological movement of Saint Francis of Assisi is operating - REFA, under the heading: "A Christian versus the world of creations", and it organizes national ecological symposiums of catholics in Cracow. See Z. Świerczek. (1990), *Ekologia i św. Franciszek*, Kraków: Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne OO. Franciszkanów, Drukarnia Narodowa, p. 7.

6. *You have the task of discovering the mystery of a meal so that life is filled with life.*
7. *Break the grid of violence to understand the rules of existence.*
8. *Remember that the world is not only a reflection of your image, but it bears the imagination of One God.*
9. *When you cut a tree, leave at least one shoot so that the life is not broken.*
10. *Walk on stones with respect, because every thing has its value*
(Domka, 1996, p. 139; compare Jaromi, 2005, p. 117).

According to Z. Świerczek the beauty in nature may be felt by every sensitive human being, but in the verge of the 12th and 13th century⁵. Saint Francis (Giovanni Bernardone) could see not only beauty, but he also experienced the presence of God in nature. He treated nature as the church of God, who lives in it. Whereas people do not know his faith (the religious attitude of Saint Francis of Assisi), they sometimes believe that he had tendency to pantheism (worshipping nature as god).

It should be emphasized that Saint Francis was against gaining knowledge for the purposes of showing it around. In his simplicity and modesty he was far from ruling over other people, he was trying to bring peace to the society. In the years of people's oppression he realized brotherhood with all creatures (he referred with respect to people, even if they are sinners, he prayed for cruel people), he gave back freedom to birds, fish, animals caught in fishers' nets. For Saint Francis of Assisi nature is a "wonderful gift" (compare Świerczek, 1900, p. 113; compare Jaromi, 2009, p. 82). Loving poverty (Kędzierski, 1926, p. 10) he announced the necessity of a permanent and honest work, he claimed that poverty was not humiliation. Św. Francise of Assise prayed also in fields and in forests, he became a personal illustration of the idea of a rebirth of people thanks to kindness and love as the values necessary to live in the human environment (compare Kosiński, 1925, p. 44):

*Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor,
and all blessing.*

⁵ He was born in 1181 and died in 1226. He founded the Order of Friars Minors (Franciscan - 1209) and (with his disciple Saint Clara) the Order of Franciscan Clare nuns (1212). In 1224 during a prayer in the Appenines he had a mystic experience and the stigmata appeared on his body. He was canonized in 1228.

*To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.
Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will
find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

*Praise and bless my Lord,
and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility**

*Translation by the Franciscan Friars Third Order Regular (Saint. Francis, 1910, p. 49; compare Porębowicz, 1900, p. 101; compare Francis, 1993, p. 83).

T. Garbowski put it in general that the creative reflection of Saint Francis of Assisi should be associated with recognizing the rules of love as the environmental necessity and although the medieval mysticism used to be a contradiction of life, the Franciscan's choice of the painful way of life full of suffering (interrupted with premature death) has become a life affirmation, a source of spiritual power, willingness to do good things, apotheosis of the cult of nature in the environment of life (compare Garbowski, 1910, p. 7). This ideal - of humbleness, mercy, forgiveness, repentance is a great ethical beauty in the love of God in nature, and the St. Francis's "Canticle of the Sun" is one of the oldest masterpieces of Italian literature and was the starting point for the folk religious poetry of the Franciscans (Porębowicz, 1900 p. 100).

A. Kalinowska believes that the modesty and the ascetic style of life of St. Francis has become a pattern of ecological personality, non-usable concept of nature, contemplating its beauty as the perfect creation of God. Quoting Leopold Staff - the poet, who translated the biography of St. Francis entitled "Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi" the author summed up: "St. Francis lifted the curse from the Earth, the beauty of which and the sacrum of the Middle Ages was given to Satan. He made it saint again" (Kalinowska, 1993, p. 19).

At this moment let me remind that the ecological intuitions may be seen in the attitudes of many saint people. An example may be the environmental imagination of St. Theresa from Jesus (she took from the wealth of nature ⁶ to understand the spiritual rules) as well as sensitivity

⁶ For example the symbolics of water, as the grace of expiation; fire as the symbolics of desire; air as the metaphor of good winds. See M. Zawada. (2009), *Saint Theresa from Jesus: explanation of God and oneself based on examples from nature*, in: S. Niziński (red.), *Ekologia a duchowość chrześcijańska*, Poznań: *Flos Carmeli* Wydawnictwo Warszawskiej Prowincji Karmelitów Bosych, p. 27 and next.

towards the beauty of nature of the St. Theresa from Lisieux⁷. Intuitions of St. Thomas Aquinas concern the co-dependence and purposeful relations of all beings in the theocentric vision of the world, in which there is no room for hostile treatment of people and natural environment (compare Łukomski, 2007, p. 23).

2. Respect for life in the concept of Albert Schweitzer

The ethics of life has become a passion and the content of daily activity of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), philosopher, theologian, physician, musician. In 1899 he obtained a doctorate in philosophy in Strasbourg, and in 1900 a doctorate in theology, in 1902 habilitation in theology and in 1913 a doctorate in medicine (Schweitzer, 1991, p. 71). Although he was well educated and in the years 1918-1929 he gave many speeches in numerous European countries: in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, England, Spain, Germany - he resigned his academic career to help the inhabitants of the African jungle. He wrote a biography of J.S. Bach and from the financial resources obtained from remunerations for recitals he built and equipped hospital, which he ran until his death. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his activity. He has become the author of a moral program, which he called the ethics of the grace of life. His works are full of respect for life ⁸.

It may be added that Albert Schweitzer's concept of respect for life is reflected in the contemporary ecological organizations, because he believed that glory (respect) for life was the basic ethic idea. He created a thesis: „I am life, which desires to live, among life, which desires to live” (Schweitzer, 1991, p. 8) he assumed that kindness and respect for the spiritual hist of the other person, which a person sends to the environment of life, works creatively in human hearts and minds. Schweitzer reasoned that people, who received a lot of kindness in their lives, should offer the same to other ones, and a person, whose suffering was saved, should feel summoned to bring relief in other people's suffering, because in the Schweitzer's concept every

⁷ Had the gift of reading the majesty of nature thanks to sensitivity to its beauty. She painted pictures. See. K. Pawłowski, *Święta Teresa z Lisieux: księga przyrody metaforą tajemnicy Bożego uniżenia*, in: Ibidem, p. 105 and next.

⁸ As an unlimited responsibility in relation to everything, which is alive.

person should help carry the burden of pain hanging over the world (compare Schweitzer, 1991, p. 55).

According to Schweitzer, ideas in confrontation with tough reality usually break - as he put it - under the burden of facts. However it does not mean that they must resign, but they do not have enough power, because human intentions are not always as clear, strong and constant as they should be. Schweitzer explained that people should work on themselves, aim at psychological maturity and become simpler and simpler, more and more sincere, kind and compassionate (compare Schweitzer, 1991, p. 67). In his autobiography he quoted the words of Jesus: „Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth” (Schweitzer, 1991, p. 69) and emphasized that the true power is not noisy, but it exists and it works. The real ethics starts, where words are silent (compare Schweitzer, 1974, p. 36).

The basic rule of ethics of Albert Schweitzer is a person's relationship to every human being in respect of life, which is the ethics of love along with realizing active attitudes of humanity and peaceful coexistence, overwhelming the whole Universe. Schweitzer believed that for a person, who is really ethical, all life is saint, also the one, which seems lower from the human point of view. He emphasized that the person, who follows the ethics of respect for life does not harm life, he or she only destroys it, when he or she cannot avoid it (but does not do it on purpose). Every person should show as much kindness to an animal and not to kill "for sport"⁹, but look for possibilities to help life, to try put off suffering and death from a living creature (compare Schweitzer, 1974, p. 52).

After World War Two Albert Schweitzer took part in the action against the arms race. He opted to stop the inhuman thinking and creating a destructive culture of war, threat of life because of nuclear threat. The world needs shaping the attitudes of respect for life expressed in a peaceful coexistence of societies. Schweitzer put it in general that thanks to environmental protection of life we are becoming religious in the basic and deep manner (compare Schweitzer, 1974, p. 30).

⁹ A. Schweitzer reminded that Rene Descartes suggested a view in the new philosophy that animals have no souls, that they are only machines. Compare A. Schweitzer. (1974), *Życie* (trans. J. Piechowski, introduction by G. Goetting), Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, p. 53.

3. Social and moral order in the environment of life in the catholic social science

The value of peaceful and dignified coexistence in the life environment in the global scale has become the subject of pondering of the Catholic Church luminaries. Pope John XXIII w encyclical entitled. „*Pacem in terris*” (John XXIII, 1964, p. 22) explained this problem in the aspect of the following social interactions: first of all - relations between people, second - relations between the citizens and the public authorities; third - relations between states, fourth - relations between states and people and the world authorities. The fifth part contains pastoral indications.

Except for the presented horizontal layers, the encyclical also has vertical layers, namely, the above problems are discussed in the light of the following four rules: life in truth, justice, love, freedom. Pope John XXIII, also in the encyclical „*Mater et magistra*” (Jan XXIII, 1962, p. 53) considered the issue of defense of human dignity and the social science of the Catholic Church, which constitutes the integral part of science on human life (ibidem, p. 49) in the scope of creating a harmonious social development and cooperation in the world scale, "so that states live in peace and support each other" (Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, 1981, p. 28).

Pope Paul VI also expressed his care about dignified life, especially in the encyclical entitled „*Populorum progressio*”, in which he justified the value of peaceful cooperation of people of good will, who are aware that the road to good (integral) order in the life society leads mostly via the cultural and economic development (compare Paul VI, 1981, p. 141). In the apostolic exhortation entitled "On Christian Joy", when considering human need of "joy at heart", the prayer for a gift of joy - he encouraged that "many nations suffering poverty should be provided by other countries acting together, at least with a minimum support, wellbeing, safety, justice, things necessary for happiness, which they are deprived of, because such several action is the creation of God" (Paul VI, 1975, p. 5) Pope Paul VI was the advocate of peaceful and international cooperation on behalf of the dialog of cultures, fighting with famine and racism, solidarity in healing the bad commercial relations (between rich and poor states), protection of freedom, fight for dignified life of workers with the structures abusing power. He explained that the Christian vision of development may not be limited to economy, but

it also should treat a person as a value in the harmonious development of societies (compare Paul VI, b.r.w., p. 7). He put it in general that the growing lack of balance between the very fast progress of rich societies and the slow development of poor societies leads to the "clash of traditional civilizations with the new ones" (ibidem, p. 6). The effect of the lack of balance is the exclusive humanism, which is inhuman in fact. Therefore the dialog should be carried out in "complete truth" (Paul VI, 2006, p. 70), to reduce the existing antinomies, and to promote peaceful cooperation. Paul VI put it in general that the human society is seriously ill because of the robbery of exploitation of natural goods in the environment of life (compare Paul VI, 1999, p. 43).

This thought was continued by the St. John Paul II, among others in the encyclical „*Redemptor hominis*” (John Paul II, 1994, p. 44-45). He emphasized the huge value of the protection of a human being in the modern era of a very fast growth of the speed of technology development, new technologies, which may lead to disorders and mental illnesses and be a threat of human dignity. In the view of John Paul II, the balanced development of societies is the "civilization of life"¹⁰ and love” (John Paul II, 2004, p. 15), it implies the cultural heritage, national esteem, human dignity, prevention of social pathologies. It is a moral spiritual order, social, economic, political, cultural order, which refers to all fields of life.

The Pope pointed to the necessity of defense of the sacrum of the human life, especially against the genetic manipulations and propagating the family, as the most valuable social and educational environment, as well as undertaking the fight with poverty and diseases by promoting a harmonious, integral¹¹ development in the society of life and preventing ecological catastrophes (compare Plenkowski, 2004, p. 18). He expressed his worry because of the robbery nature of exploiting the energy resources and care about the protection of a human being against environmental contamination. He emphasized his satisfaction, that respect for the environment of life is more and more common, it is becoming a style of life

¹⁰ See the Pope's warnings against continuing the "culture of death", in: L. Michnowski. (2006), *Ekohumanizm i trwały rozwój a koncepcja cywilizacji życia i miłości Jana Pawła II*, in: A. Skowroński (red.), *Rozmaitości ekofilozofii*, Olecko: Wydawnictwo Wszechnicy Mazurskiej Acta Universitatis Masuriensis (EPISTEME 57/2006), p. 311 – 321.

¹¹ Compare the personal creativity of J. Maritain - especially his book published in 1936 entitled "*Integral humanism*".

(compare John Paul II, 2000, p. 17) enlisted in the whole culture of peaceful coexistence and prevention of pathologies, which are destructive to the social and environmental society. For John Paul II, the art of educating is a special form of art (John Paul, 2005, p. 10), thanks to which the power of Kindness may be protected in the nature of Beauty (Ibidem p. 8), to shape mature humanity.

The quoted examples selected on purpose it results that the social and moral order is to be shaped on the foundation of ontological dignity of a human being and be expressed in the attitude of responsibility for the environment of life¹². This thought was continued creatively also by Pope Benedict XVI, and he emphasized the cultural conditions of the value of respect for life (Benedict XVI, 2009, p. 32) as a common good, leading to the human homeostasis and responsibility for its protection (irrespective of the professional specialization) (compare ibidem, p. 81) The concept of integral development in the view of Benedict XVI remains in the servitude of Christian humanism, leading a person as a subject of own existence, by love and truth to international cooperation in creating social and moral order, citizens and economic order in the society of life. Pope Francis also wrote about it in the encyclical *LAUDATO SI* "In the care about our common home", and he emphasized the huge meaning of personal conversion as St. Francis of Assisi did, in the care of the common place of living (compare Francis, 2015, p. 132).

Conclusion

Forming a conclusion on respect for life as the ecological value it is worth to remind the valuable thoughts of J. Życiński on the environmental fatherland of a person, especially in the context of looking for the whole truth about the world of nature (the integral part of which is a human being) and the Christian idealization of environment (compare Życiński, 1992, p. 182), wartości integracji *humanum* i *sacrum*. In the Christian eco-ethics the social and natural environment is a value and a common good. The concept *ecologia humana* – wide understanding and explanation concerns

¹² In the face of civilization threats a new economic order is necessary. See J. Dębowski. (1992), *Etyczne aspekty międzynarodowej współpracy ekologicznej*, in: E. J. Pałyga (red. nauk.), *Ekologia społeczna i współpraca międzynarodowa w zakresie ochrony środowiska*, Warszawa: Autonomiczny Komitet Ekspertów Ekologicznych, p. 26.

interpretation of particular parts of the ecosystem in the place of living (considering the symbolical value, emotional, usable, economic), contemplating the "book of nature" (John Paul II, 2003, p. 9-11) in the process of maturing to the "final clarity and light" (ibidem, p. 27), overcoming the sources of pathology (evil) in the intra personal and common dialog thanks to intellectual maturity, as well as emotional and social one.

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