

## THE MANAGEMENT OF THE GLOBE'S RESOURCES IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT PAPAL ENCYCLICALS

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses mainly on human ecology and social-geography related aspects of the Encyclicals issued and published in the course of the three last Pontificates – i.e. those of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, as addressed to both the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church and all people of good will.

In his Encyclicals, the late Pope John Paul II is seen to refer to contemporary problems pervading and perplexing the world, drawing particular attention to the further development of civilisation and to social (i.e. social inequality) aspects and changes ongoing. Holy Father John Paul II refers *inter alia* to a perceived boundary between wellbeing and poverty running within the same societies, be these highly developed or only just embarking on the path of development, and also offers very profound justification for the idea that the fundamental unit of human ecology is the family, as the foundation of both life and development.

Consideration is then given to a 6-part Encyclical issued by Pope Benedict XVI, it being noted how His Holiness's point of view, and way of looking at the sustainable development of the environment and the Earth is presented in a concrete, synthetic and very concise manner.

For his part, Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si* Encyclical – is shown to detail profound cause-effect linkage between the present economic situation globally and the huge disparities within and between societies. Also highlighted is His Holiness's proposal that a so-called integral ecology be introduced.

The paper's author concludes by recalling other recent (July 2016) events that are also of exceptional relevance to the subject, i.e. the World Youth Days held in Kraków with

the participation of Pope Francis. Here, special reference is made to content in which His Holiness addresses current challenges to the several million young people present, and puts forward views regarding a new social and human revolution.

**KEY WORDS:** global environmental, natural resources, sustainable development, papal encyclicals: John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis – *Laudato Si* Encyclical.

The successive Popes of the three last Pontificates – i.e. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis – have all written Encyclicals addressed to the faithful – and often beyond – and containing the pure teaching of the Church, as rendered with great authority, courage and love<sup>1</sup>.

## THE ENCYCLICALS OF HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

The most all-encompassing series of many Encyclicals ostensibly linked only loosely with one another in terms of subject matter is that generated and delivered by His Holiness Pope John Paul II<sup>2</sup>. Where humankind's links with nature are concerned, the most important (as listed in line with titles in Latin) are:

- *Redemptor Hominis* (The Redeemer of Man),
- *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy),
- *Laborem Exercens* (Through Work),
- *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life),
- *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples).

In the last (*Populorum Progressio*) Encyclical, which is considered to put great emphasis on social (i.e. social inequality) aspects and changes in the modern world, John Paul II builds on an Encyclical of his predecessor Paul VI, as he refers to hope relating to the further development of civilisation (and the fact that these phases of development cannot be held back), as well as a reducing of economic disparities through UN and other efforts to counteract the division of the globe into a developed and rich “North” and a poor and backward “South”.

The geographical terminology used by John Paul II in the above Encyclical relates to a perceived boundary between wellbeing and poverty running within the same societies, be these highly developed or only just embarking on the path of development.

<sup>1</sup> An Encyclical is a form of papal address delivered during the Pontificate of a given Pope, addressed to both Roman Catholic Church hierarchies and all faithful people (at times “all people of good will”), concerned with matters of faith and moral attitudes, but continuing to be general in nature. The name derives from the Greek word *enkýklos*, which in fact denotes something that is both “general” and “internal” or “inner” or “central” (Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, 1967, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa).

<sup>2</sup> *Encykliki Papieża Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, (Encyclicals of Holiness Pope John Paul II), 1996, Wyd. Znak, Kraków, as originally published by *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, (Wyd. Biblioteki Watykańskiej, collected and elaborated by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek), running to 1102 pages.

The visible nature that the Greeks sought to order our world with, using the term *Kosmos*, is viewed as taking in animate and inanimate natural components of our planet – the plants, animals and rocks that may not be used in any way we choose, but solely with a view to defined economic needs being met. It is in this light that account is taken of the need for present and future generations to hold in check their use of natural resources – especially the non-renewable ones. Reference is at the same time made to consequences for quality of life in industrialised areas, with all the serious impacts on human health that this entailed.

A century on, John Paul II harked back to the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical of his long-serving predecessor Leo XIII in addressing the issue of “private property and the universal destination of material goods”. The right to private property is defined here as something natural, but also subject to many limitations. One of the paragraphs provides renewed teaching on the above issue, as well as a perspective on the origin of goods, in terms of their satisfying human needs; and the issue of rights. The Creator made the Earth, and humankind upon it, with the former given to the latter on the basis of mastery through work, with the fruits of that work and our planet being enjoyed by people to the exclusion of nobody. The latter condition also relates to the justification for the aforesaid “universal destination” of the Earth’s goods, with work and the land forever interacting together. The issue of the ownership of the industrialised countries’ ownership of knowledge, technology and skills thus assumes considerable significance.

Paragraph 37 concerns “the ecological question”, and hence the relationship between humankind and nature, as well as the quantitative and qualitative destruction of an environment that is ultimately the habitat (i.e. a place to live) for the human being.

As he considers the causes and effects relating to these issues, John Paul II also offers very profound justification for the idea that the fundamental unit of human ecology is the family, as the foundation of both life and development.

Paragraph 40 of *Centesimus Annus* then notes how “it is the task of the State to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces”.

## **THE *CARITAS IN VERITATE* ENCYCLICAL OF HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI<sup>3</sup>**

This Encyclical – again addressed to the lay faithful and all people of good will – is concerned with “Integral human development in charity and truth” (where “charity” can also be taken to denote love). It was first read in 2009, and comprises 6 Chapters (further divided into 79 sub-Chapters) entitled:

- I. The Message of *Populorum Progressio*, (Development of Elementary);

<sup>3</sup> The *Caritas in Veritate* Encyclical of Holy Father Benedict XVI “on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth”, insert to the *Niedziela* weekly magazine, no. 29, July 2009, pp. I–XV.

- II. Human Development in Our Time;
- III. Fraternity, Economic Development and Civil Society;
- IV. The Development of People, Rights and Duties, The Environment;
- V. The Cooperation of the Human Family;
- VI. The Development of Peoples and Technology.

Let us linger over the content of Chapter IV, as made up of 9 sub-Chapters. In these, Benedict XVI refers to directions of development assumed by business in its international, fund-related configuration. The matter of the Earth's development is linked up with the human being's relationship with a natural environment left ever-poorer from the point of view of future generations. Humankind treats the environment from the point of view of cultural activity and moral and normative rights, thus its integral development must always bear future generations in mind, being characterised by stability and inter-generational justice, and taking account of fields ecological, legal, economic, political and cultural alike. Pope Benedict XIV notes that treatment of the environment must take issues of power supply into account, in particular where this concerns raw material and non-renewable resources, with attention being focused on new, alternative sources. This is particularly true of poor countries that destructively sell off their own resources and raw materials. To this end, a planned redistribution of raw materials and sources of power around the globe is needed. Reference is also made to new lifestyles, to a new social contract, and to an international agreement that would help regulate the ever-greater number of regions that face conflict and other problems.

Overall, Pope Benedict XVI's point of view, and way of looking at the sustainable development of the environment and the Earth has been presented here in a concrete, synthetic and very concise manner.

## THE *LAUDATO SI* ENCYCLICAL OF POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis's latest *Laudato Si* Encyclical "On Care for our Common Home"<sup>4</sup> (which was published in June 2015) can be accessed in a Polish version from the Kraków-based *Wydawnictwo M*. There are six main Chapters to this 160-page Encyclical (as further divided into sub-Chapters), whose English-language titles are:

- I. What is Happening to our Common Home?
- II. The Gospel of Creation;
- III. The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis;
- IV. Integral Ecology;
- V. Lines of Approach and Action;
- VI. Ecological Education and Spirituality

<sup>4</sup> Encyklika Ojca Świętego Franciszka, *Laudato Si*, „W trosce o wspólny dom” (Encyclical Holy Father Francis *Laudato Si* "On Care for our Common Home"), Polish version, 2015, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków, 160 pp.

Pope Francis referred to contemporary problems pervading and perplexing our world, drawing particular attention to the need for the Earth's climate to be protected, with every effort also made to address issues of the pollution of air, fresh waters and the Oceans, leading to ongoing loss of biological diversity from ecosystems. Francis raises the issue of society's responsible approach to renewable and non-renewable natural resources and sources of energy, at the same time acknowledging international cooperation over the conservation of nature.

In this document, Holy Father Francis offers a penetrating analysis of the contemporary environmental crisis, pointing to both its causes and its negative consequences. His Holiness proposes effective resolving of the problems mentioned by way of greater social solidarity with the poor countries; and people are also called upon to change their habits as regards the use of natural resources. The postulates advanced here are targeted directly at increased effort to limit changes of climate that may not be ignored.

Pope Francis also presents the profound cause-effect linkage between the present economic situation globally and huge disparities within and between societies. In a spirit of care for our common home (the Earth), global processes and phenomena are looked at with characteristic sensitivity, but also in a penetrating way, with objective causes sought, and the best and most appropriate pragmatic solutions presented. His Holiness proposes that a so-called integral ecology be introduced, with this finding a particular place for today's human beings in our world, as designated for us by God; while also identifying the relationships pertaining between our species and the reality all around us.

This Encyclical delivered by The Holy Father on May 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 is a key document in the worldwide discussion concerning, not only the Earth's natural environment, but also the particular role played within it by the common good that is water. The current ecological and economic situations remain closely linked with global changes of climate, and these also bring about hydrological change.

Pope Francis presents the scientific premises making it clear that the Earth as our common home needs protecting, not least out of care for humanity, which cannot somehow derogate from sustainable development. A review of the different causes and effects linked to the present environmental crisis is carried out, and future directions as regards dialogue and action outlined. Global warming, atmospheric pollution, water deficits and biodiversity loss are all referred to, and set against real needs and the rhythm of life; and it is noted once again how we take too little account of the elements to the development of future generations of our species.

The climate and climate change, as well as the latter's causes and effects, are borne in mind as His Holiness makes reference to the need for the scientific consensus to be upheld, with this respect for science being seen as a basic requirement in the world we live in.

The issue of water, as dealt with in Point II of the first Chapter, is highlighted against the background of the aquifers, rivers, glaciers, etc. as sources of supply. Water in appropriate quantity, of the necessary quality, represents a key issue on our planet for humanity, nature and development alike, and all the more so in the arid or semi-

arid parts of Africa, Asia and Australia<sup>5</sup>. The importance of water reflects the way it is essential for life, and *inter alia* for maintaining nature and the economy.

Pope Francis draws attention to biological diversity at the levels of the individual species and ecosystem, as well as referring to the significance of the acidification of seas and oceans, and the threat posed to the food chain in the aquatic environment. Reference is made to the concept of water not being a good to be traded in, but a common good, given the way it conditions human survival. In the view of Pope Francis, the world's situation as regards water may not be controlled by huge corporations, because this control will then become a source of further conflicts in the future.

The cited Encyclicals form a strong voice on the part of The Church directed at each Catholic, and at the whole of humankind. They form the basis of challenges set before both academic circles, the world of business and society more widely. They also stand as a key inspiration for further, more profound consideration, as well as interdisciplinary study. After all, clean drinking water, clean air and intact nature are key elements upon which the modern world – with humankind in it – depend.

The Encyclicals presented further relate to social awareness, justice and empathy in the context of access to the Earth's renewable and non-renewable resources and goods. And it is sustainable economic development that underpins these.

The *Laudato Si* Encyclical in particular also serves as an inspiration to much further interdisciplinary research and activity as regards the natural environment. Let its ongoing relevance and popularity in Poland be attested to by a national scientific conference jointly organised (in Warsaw on 16.03.2016) by the Department of Environmental Protection of Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW), the Institute of Ecology and Bioethics of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University's Faculty of Christian Philosophy, *Koalicja Klimatyczna*, the faculty of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture of SGGW and the Warsaw City Office. The Catholic weekly *Gość Niedzielny* and Catholic Information Agency (KAI) assumed media patronage over the Conference. Academic-participants numbered more than 100, and they represented many different disciplines, including philosophy, bioethics, biology, hydrology, nature conservation and environmental protection, economics, climatology, landscape architecture and the social sciences.

The Conference's three plenary sessions were devoted to: 1. – the Opening, 2. – The *Laudato Si* Encyclical as an inspiration for research in the environmental field, and 3. – the Panel Discussion. The *Laudato Si* Session comprised 8 wide-ranging and substantive papers given. Beyond that, the five voices participating in the discussion were also well integrated into the main Conference theme. It was noted that many social initiatives relating to the health of the environment had been pursued against the background of Pope Francis's writing. Reference was also made to aspects linked to didactics and upbringing, *inter alia* exemplified by the work of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

<sup>5</sup> Gromiec M., 2015, Kwestia wody na tle problemów ekologicznych świata w encyklice *Laudato Si*, (Question of water on the ecological world problems in *Laudato Si* Encyclical), *Gospodarka Wodna*, 281, vol. 10, pp. 281–282.

As the speakers emphasised, the content of Pope Francis's Encyclical is capable of evoking many different emotions, not least serving as a clarion call for greater efforts to tackle the causes of climate change, and to seek to arrest its further development. As main organisers, Z. Karaczan, K. Niemirowicz and A. Latawiec declared that it would be a noble goal to consider the extent to which the Encyclical's content does or may in future serve as an inspiration for pure and applied research in environmental protection; as well as the way in which ideas advanced by Pope Francis find their justification in practice, and are translated into concrete action.

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Summing up, it needs to be emphasised that the Encyclicals referred to, though varied in subject matter, are in large measure concordant in their conceptualisation of the contemporary world and changes in its development, and in the aspects thereof that they elect to emphasise. The Encyclicals of John Paul II and Francis are directed at similar matters of the environment and society, concerning nature and the use of energy and resources; and especially the significance for development of climate, waters and animate nature, now and in the future. The matters of global change on Earth, as registered and announced in the Encyclicals, can also inspire scientific research, and all Poles (but not only!) will certainly gain much from a careful reading and understanding of the profundity of these works.

Popes Francis, John Paul II and Benedict XVI all lead from the front, indicating the value of concrete economic, social and political activity, and suggesting equally concrete solutions. These are particular strongpoints of the Encyclicals referred to here.

Overall, the Encyclicals have many common features, even if the nuances as regards the approach to the environment, and the human being within it, naturally differ from one author to another. The most resonant words are perhaps those in the *Laudato Si* Encyclical of Pope Francis, while those of John Paul II run very deep, pointing in a serious way to solutions that relate to social awareness, justice and equality, as well as empathy.

As this issue of *Papers on Global Change* is given over for publication, it is impossible not to recall the events of exceptional importance that the "World Youth Days" represent, and all the more so given the way their content connects so integrally with the subject matter of the Encyclicals referred to.

Between July 28<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, it was the Polish city of Kraków that was privileged to host the 32<sup>nd</sup> (if Central Europe's first ever) World Youth Days – with the participation of Pope Francis. His Holiness addressed current challenges to the several million young people assembled there, setting out truths as regard the discovery of passion and happiness in life, as well as the taking of risks. In each case it was considered that these would be difficult or indeed impossible to achieve without God.

Such social issues are in fact emphasised strongly in the *Laudato Si* Encyclical, wherein Pope Francis indicates directions actions should take if the sustainable development of the Earth – and its peoples – is to be achieved. That future for the Earth is found to be dependent on our limiting our comforts and our consumption of goods, while acquiring

a newfound human courage and capacity to take risks that opens up new, less-materialistic horizons associated with happiness and joy. A key strand here concerns the miraculous gift of mercy – a matter particularly manifest in the case of Pope Francis – with 2016 having been declared the Holy Year (Extraordinary Jubilee) of Mercy.



Figure 1. One of a series of three postage stamps issued by *Poczta Polska S.A.* to mark the World Youth Days held in Kraków in July 2016

The 31<sup>st</sup> World Youth Days proved to be a time of faith, joy, prayer and the renewal of hearts, with what transpired in Kraków representing the strong and vigorous response of the youth of the entire world to the terror, war and injustice seemingly holding sway in so many regions. Pope Francis referred to liberty arising out of people's own freedom of choice, albeit with mercy representing the core of the "social revolution" that can spur people into action and allow evil to be stood up against. His Holiness also stressed in particular the need for a person's own individual identity to be held on to in all of this.

There can be no doubt as to the value inherent in becoming better acquainted with the profound sense set out in the Encyclicals referred to. And in fact this is likely to serve not only Poles, but also the whole of humanity, very well indeed.

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