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THE APPEAL OF POLISH CHURCHES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CREATION

Abstract. The article presents the *Appeal of Polish Churches for the protection of creation*. It was signed the 16 January 2013 in Warsaw by heads of seven Churches belonging to the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church. This ecumenical statement is an appeal and also a request to preserve creation as a work of God.

Key words: creation, protection, Polish Ecumenical Council, Roman Catholic Church in Poland.

I. 40 YEARS OF OFFICIAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POLAND AND THE POLISH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL (1974-2014)

The Polish Ecumenical Council (PEC) was officially constituted in Warsaw on 15 November 1946. Currently, seven Churches belong to the PEC: the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Polish Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Reformed Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, and the Polish Baptist Union. The Bible Society in Poland and the Social Association of Polish Catholics have affiliated member status.

Until the end of the 1960s, relations between the PEC and the Roman Catholic Church had an unofficial character. The Mixed Committee of the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenism was

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inaugurated in 1974. It enabled official contact to be established between the Roman Catholic Church and the PEC. In 1977 the Mixed Committee appointed a Sub-committee for Dialogue, to be concerned with talks on theological subjects. Twenty years later (1997), on the basis of the cooperation to date, a Committee for Dialogue of the Polish Bishops' Conference and the Polish Ecumenical Council was established.

One of the important results of the cooperation between the PEC and the Roman Catholic Church took place in 2000, when the heads of member Churches of the PEC (excepting the Church of Christian Baptists) and the Roman Catholic Church signed a document on "The Sacrament of Baptism as a Sign of Unity," in which the signatories declared their mutual recognition of the validity of baptism. Since 2000 the Committee for Dialogue has been examined the issue of mixed marriages.¹

II. ISSUE OF THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

The issue of the integrity of creation has been examined by Committee for Dialogue of the Polish Bishops' Conference and the Polish Ecumenical Council since the 5 October 2007. It was a stimulus of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly held the 4–9 September 2007 in Sibiu in Romania in which delegates of Polish Churches had participated. Its final Assembly Message contained the statement and the recommendation: "Concerned about God's creation, we pray for a greater sensitivity and respect for its wonderful diversity. We work against its shameless exploitation [...] and commit ourselves to working for reconciliation between humanity and nature [...] We recommend that the period from the 1st September to the 4th of October be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change."² The Committee for Dialogue organized the ecumenical conference on this issue held in Warsaw the 20 October 2010 and finished the drafting of the statement in 2012.

¹ Rada ds. Ekumenizmu Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Polska Rada Ekumeniczna, *Przemienieni przez zwycięstwo Jezusa Chrystusa (por. 1 Kor 15,51-58). Tydzień Modlitw o Jedność Chrześcijan 18- 25 stycznia 2012* (Warszawa: Polska Rada Ekumeniczna, 2011), 95–97.

² "Assembly Message," <http://www.eea3.org/documenti/final/FinalmessageEN.pdf> [10.03.2014].

III. TEXT OF THE STATEMENT

*Appeal of Polish Churches for the Protection of Creation*³

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are sending you an ecumenical letter which is an appeal and also a request to preserve creation as a work of God.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1,1)—the Bible starts with these magnificent words. The world was not created by blind chance, but by the will of a loving and wise God, as was man, whom “God created in His own image” (cf. Gen. 1,27). Later, as the Scriptures state, “the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Gen. 2,15). The Creator invites man to work together in caring for His work, which serves all living things. Every Christian tradition gives examples of prominent people who treated the whole of God’s creation with love. Regrettably, we are not always faithful to this call.

We are producing heaps of waste, poisonous food, we are cutting down forests, we are surrounding ourselves with plastic. Being blinded by greed, we replace clear streams with poisonous sewage, luxuriant forests and cornfields with barren and empty soil, and nature’s wonders with heaps of concrete. We are living as if we were the last generation inhabiting the earth.

Protection of the environment is not only a technical question of ecological balance, but also a moral and spiritual problem of modern man, who forgets that he and the world have been created by God.

Many Christians all over the world become involved in specific programmes for the protection of God’s creation. The most popular ones are building management projects aimed at decreasing electricity and heat consumption, reducing the production of waste, recycling, composting, etc.

Brothers and Sisters, this awareness must be promoted! We trust that thanks to our appeal believers will influence the people around them to curb harmful activities, e.g. dumping waste in forests or thoughtless littering of streets, roads and fields.

This appeal is also directed to central and local governments. We are expressing our concern with regard to privatization and commercialization of water resources and public space.

³ “Apel Kościołów w Polsce o ochronę stworzenia,” *Wiadomości KAI*, 2013.01.27 (no. 1086): 3. Translation: Polish Ecumenical Council.

We encourage you to shape social policies in a way which promotes safe processing and recycling of poisonous waste. In particular, we are calling for:

- a cut in communal waste; recovery and recycling of tips; cleaning the air, water and soil;
- the protection of forests and endangered plant species, as well as other treasures of nature; restoration of ecosystems;
- the application of nature-friendly technologies in food processing and preservation, as well as in the production of packagings;
- the preparation of international agreements on the fair use of marine resources, which will not upset the ecological balance.

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit, God showed that He overcomes all depravity and death. A Christian is called to manifest his faith in God, the Creator and Lord of the universe by his deeds. That is why we seek to ensure the protection of human life from its conception and respect for its dignity. We appeal for the support of a social policy which enables life to spread wherever natural growth is on the decline. The world needs such a testimony, not only from those few who are committed to the protection of the environment, but from all disciples of Christ. To understand these processes, the dynamic development of biblical and theological reflection on the subject of creation can be of help to Christians.

Our common activities should express the truth about the need for prudent and moderate actions in everything that is connected with our environment. Wise asceticism is expressed by avoiding excessive consumption, responsible use of natural resources as well as renouncing the excessive manufacture and accumulation of objects and packaging. One of its signs is fasting, which is increasingly forgotten. Fasting, meaning the restriction of one's own desires, becomes an instrument of spiritual transformation and helping the needy. The God-given task to rule over things is designed to prevent them from ruling over us.

Brothers and Sisters, as we live today, let us think about tomorrow. Let us consider that we and the whole of creation are called to live in the reality described in the last book of the Bible as a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21,1). Let us therefore make responsible choices saving energy and natural resources every day, and let us care about every living thing. Even small actions, if they are persistently carried out, will have an enormous effect in protecting the whole of creation, about which we read in the first book of the Bible that "God saw that ... it was very good" (cf. Gen.1,31).

Warsaw, 16 January 2013

Rev. Gustaw Cieślak /The Church of Christian Baptists in Poland/
Rev. Jerzy Samiec /The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran) in Poland/
Rev. Edward Puslecki /The Evangelical Methodist Church in Poland/
Rev. Marek Izdebski /The Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland/
Rev. Wiktor Wysoczański /The Polish Catholic Church in Poland/
Rev. Ludwik Jabłoński /The Old Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland/
Rev. Metropolitan Sawa /The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church/
Rev. Jozef Michalik /The Chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church/

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APPEAL

The signed appeal has a distinguished theological dimension based on the faith in God the Creator and our salvation achieved by Christ in the Holy Spirit which will find its fulfilment in a “new heaven and a new earth.” The document emphasises the “ecology of the human person” whom God created in His own image. This appeal is also directed to central and local governments because even small actions, if they are persistently carried out, will have an enormous effect in protecting the whole of creation. However, the statement is a sign of the growing consciousness of the question of the Polish theological milieu (see below).

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APEL KOŚCIOŁÓW W POLSCE
O OCHRONĘ STWORZENIA

Streszczenie

W artykule został przedstawiony *Apel Kościołów w Polsce o ochronę stworzenia*, podpisany 16 stycznia 2013 r. przez zwierzchników siedmiu Kościołów należących do Polskiej Rady Ekumenicznej i przez Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. Ten ekumeniczny dokument jest apelem i prośbą o zachowanie Bożego stworzenia jako dzieła Boga.

Słowa kluczowe: ochrona stworzenia, Polska Rada Ekumeniczna, Kościół rzymskokatolicki w Polsce.