International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development
Online ISSN: 2349-4182, Print ISSN: 2349-5979, Impact Factor: RJIF 5.72
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Volume 4; Issue 4; April 2017; Page No. 206-215

Ecocritical Tenets in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*

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Abstract
The objective of this paper is to show in Pope Francis' Laudato Si: on Care of our Common Home (2015), his ardent concern with ecology in its literature and his use of literary devices to enhance an effective response to the call for nature's protection. The paper attempts to see to what extent Pope's religious encyclical can be considered a key text for literary ecocriticism. The methodology that will be used is obviously that of ecocriticism or green study. The paper also makes an investigation into the social teachings of Catholic Church that illustrate environmental concerns and on which Pope Francis grounds his arguments.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, -Ecological Crisis- Integral Vision-Collective Action

1. Introduction

A keen researcher can't pursue an interest in the understanding of the world in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature without bumping into the environmental movement and, by extension, ecocriticism. The imposing headlines in newspapers of the past decades pointed to many issues concerning environment like illegal dumping in the East, oil spills, protests over nuclear and e-waste waste dumps, lead and asbestos poisoning, medical syringes washing onto the shores of Atlantic beaches, destruction of the tropical rain forest, predictions of global warming, loss of topsoil, the ozone layer, toxic waste contamination, floods, famines, hurricanes, wildfire, droughts, storms and so on. This grim picture is made dynamic and timelessly relevant with newer additions to the pollution of nature. Reflecting on the impact of these issues on environment and society, we may like common observers make a few assumptions: the first is that our worst environmental problems are the result of human activity; the second, that environmental problems have a significant impact on people; the third, that solutions to our environmental problems require changes in economic and environmental policies, and the potential impact of these changes depends heavily on social and political factors; and the fourth, that many environmental problems reflect and illustrate social inequality based on social class and on race and ethnicity.

John Hopkins who wrote in his "Inversnaid" - "What would the world be, once bereft/ Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left, / O let them be left, wildness and wet; /Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet." Likeminded persons appealed against exploration of nature for exploitation. Hopkins's lines might linger a little longer and address such questions as: 'What is wilderness to us? What do we mean by "nature"? How do we represent where we are? How do we interact with the non-human world? How is that interaction mediated by such factors as historical period, regional location, race, gender, class?' Efforts to improve or set right our attitude to environment, resulted in the birth of environmental/ ecology movement, a diverse scientific, social, and political movement for addressing environmental issues. The movement also encompasses some other movements with a more specific focus, such as the climate movement. Environmentalists advocate the sustainable management of resources and stewardship of the environment through changes in public policy and individual behaviour. In its recognition of humanity as a participant in and not enemy of ecosystems, the movement is cantered on ecology, health, and human rights.

2. Development of Ecocritical Concepts

Scholars with certain ecological orientation had begun publishing progressive works of ecotheory and criticism since the explosion of environmentalism in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, there was no organized movement to study the environmental aspect of literature. Hence, these important works were scattered and categorized under a number of heads like regionalism, pastoralism, American Studies, human ecology, etc. Raymond Williams' work, *The Country and the City* published in 1973 was considered a seminal critique of pastoral literature. Ecocriticism emerged in the 1980s on the shoulders of the environmental movement. William Rueckert was the first person to use the term *ecocriticism* (Barry 240) in his 1978 essay entitled Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism. However, ecocriticism as a movement owes much to Rachel Carson's 1962 environmental exposé *Silent Spring*. To this day, ecocritcism continues to be an "earth-centered approach" (Glotfelty xviii) studying the complex intersections between environment and culture, believing that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty xix). Another early ecocritical text which proposed a version of an argument that was later to dominate ecocriticism was Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974). Here Meeker argued that environmental crisis was caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West where there was a gradual separation of culture from nature, and elevation of the former to moral predominance. Such anthropocentrism endorsed humans as the only, or primary, holders of moral standing.

In response to the question of what ecocriticism should be, Camilo Gomides offers an operational definition to Ecocriticism: "The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to

live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (Gomides). Ecocriticism thus asks people to examine themselves and the world around them, critiquing the way that they represent, interact with, and construct their environment, both "natural" and manmade.

Two words can represent this method of enquiry, namely, 'relationship' and 'commitment'. Lawrence Buell defines "'ecocriticism'... as [a] study of the 'relationship' between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of 'commitment' to environmentalist praxis". (Glotfelty & Fromm 430) It can be understood as a commitment to understand local ecology and human relationships.William Cronon writing about his work as an environmental historian, said that "human acts occur within a network of relationships, processes, and systems that are as ecological as they are cultural." Ecocriticism elucidates relationships between human and non-human nature.At the heart of ecocriticism, many maintain, is "a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point" (Buell 11). The "challenge" for ecocritics is "keep[ing] one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always […] culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists" (Gerrard 10).

Simon Estok observed in 2001 that "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections". (Estok: 2001, 220) More recently, in an paper that links ecocriticism to Shakespearean studies, Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than "simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function–thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise–of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds".(Estok: 2005, 16-17)

This echoes the functional approach of the cultural ecology, a branch of ecocriticism, which is concerned with human adaptations to social and physical environments. Human adaptation refers to both biological and cultural processes that enable a population to survive and reproduce within a given or changing environment. (Joralemon 165). The central focus is to analyse the analogies between ecosystems and imaginative texts and to posit that such texts potentially have an ecological (regenerative, revitalizing) function in the cultural system. (Zapf 2008).This may be carried out diachronically (examining entities that existed in different epochs), or synchronically (examining a present system and its components). The central argument is that the natural environment, in small scale or subsistence societies dependent in part upon it, is a major contributor to social organization and other human institutions.

Thus all ecocritics share an environmentalist motivation to investigate underlying ecological values, but whereas the majority are nature endorsing, some are nature sceptical. In part this entails a shared sense of the ways in which 'nature' has been used to legitimise gender, sexual and racial norms (so homosexuality has been seen as 'unnatural', for example). Hence, questions like what, precisely, is meant by the word nature; whether the examination of "place" should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race; what is the human perception of wilderness; how this perception has changed in the course of history; whether contemporary environmental issues are accurately represented; whether the natural should be seen primarily as a resource for human beings; what are the critical approaches to changing ideas in the material and cultural bases of modern society and so on.

3. Tenets of Ecocriticism in *Ladato Si*

Before entering into Pope Francis' *Ladato Si*, it is pertinent to consider what makes the encyclical a mouthpiece for ecocriticism. If ecocriticism's territory is the interplay of the human and the nonhuman in literary texts, Laudato si explores the relationship between the human and natural world i.e., the physical world in which that text and its reader exists. The document is fundamentally an ethical criticism and pedagogy, one that investigates and helps make possible the connections among self, society, nature, and text. It seriously call into question the various canons we have received as "given" and which continue to be taught as though nonhuman nature and the human place within it didn't matter. The text explores how we place ourselves in the world and the biological, social, and political ways in which we define where we are. The text implores the reader to recognize that major changes in the way we live are inevitable. Owing to the features we may consider, *Laudato Si* as unique among ecocritical approaches in its potential to contribute to that conversation on climate change and its impact on human life on earth. The encyclical s a response to the need for humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. In large part, the document assumes that environmental crises are a result of humanity's disconnection from the natural world, brought about not only by increasing technology but also by particularization; that is, a mentality of specialization that fails to recognize the interconnectedness of all things. As a response to felt needs and real crises, *Laudato Si* advocates holistic practice which has an inherent ideological and moral component. A holistic view of the universe is a value-cantered, one that honours the interconnectedness of things. As the interconnectedness of things is valued, so too is the integrity of all things, be they creatures of the earth, spiritual beliefs, or ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Pope Francissays *in Laudato Si*, the solution to "the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources," demands a collaboration of many sciences and strategies, including "a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm" (2).The encyclical invites dialogue on all perspectives concerning the conservation of our planet in order to understand the human relationship to the universe, the philosophies and understandings of different ethnic groups. Yet all dialogues and discussions come back to its home ground--the human relationship with the earth as it advocates for an understanding of the world that works to heal the environmental wounds humans have inflicted upon it.

4. *Laudato Si*: Textual Analysis

Now it is only logical to textually validate the ecocritical tenets which are briefly elucidated above in the development of Pope Francis' arguments in *Laudato Si*. Hence a detailed analysis of the encyclical is in order here.

4.1. The Context and the Sources

Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* may be considered as significant a document of Catholic Social Teaching as Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891). The document is a worldwide wake up call to"every person living on this planet" (3) in order to help humanity understand the destruction that man is rendering to the environment and his fellow man. While addressing the environment directly, the document's scope is broader in many ways as he places his vision in continuity with his papal predecessors (3-6) and in harmony with non-Catholic religions and secular thinkers (7-9). The encyclical looks at not only man's effect on the environment, but also the many philosophical, theological, and cultural causes that threaten the relationships of man to nature and man to each other in various circumstances. Pope Francis shows Shows how Laudato Si' is animated by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of those who promote ecology, and emphasizes the importance of these spiritual roots: "If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (11). He urgently appeals to all persons "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (14).

Both the title of the encyclical - "On Care for Our Common Home"- and its opening quote from St. Francis's canticle, "*Laudato Si*, mi Signore" establish the focus of this text. The book appears to found his perceptions of the world on the subject of "relationships" taking the cue from relating the earth as our "common home". Activities that harm this familial relationship with our planet, in turn damage our relationship with other humans, particularly those least equipped to defend themselves: the poor and future generations. Hence through this encyclical, Pope Francis intends to " enter into dialogue" with a wide target audience - all people who are "united by the same concern" (3, 7).

Consequently, the document draws on immense range of sources as the writings of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and also of the Eastern Christian traditions. The encyclical quotes from a Sufi Mystic, alludes to the twentieth-century thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin and Romano Guardini. It refers to secular documents such as the Rio Declaration from 1992 and the 2000 Earth Charter. There are also umpteen references to previous papal writings, particularly those of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI. After a comprehensive introduction, the encyclical divides into six chapters, each examining different aspects of the rupture between humans and creation, and the prospects for healing this relationship. In many ways, the structure and format of the document is very straightforward and logical.

4.2 The Pressing Issues Our Common Home

The first chapter is a frank look at the facts of our world so that the reader might "become painfully aware" of what is happening to the world we call "home." The chapter's goal may be summarised in the author's words thus:

"Theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract, unless they are grounded in a fresh analysis of our present situation, which is in many ways unprecedented in the history of humanity. So, before considering how faith brings new incentives and requirements with regard to the world of which we are a part, I will briefly turn to what is happening to our common home" (17).

The bulk of this chapter paints in detail a dire diagnostic picture of the various pressing modern ecological challenges: a variety of forms of pollution and disturbing warming of the climate (20-26), the issue of water and depletion of natural resources (27-31); the loss of biodiversity (32-42); decline in the quality of human life and relationships (43-47); and global inequality gap between the poor and the rich (48-52)." There is consensus among scientists that this picture is not something fabricated but a real glimpse into the unsustainable state of our world. For most of us, our daily lives are lived in a far remove from these stark realities of our world. The more shallow our perception of the land we occupy, the more vulnerable it is to non-retrieval exploitation of its resources for short-term gain.

If "the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all", climate change is one of the "principal challenges facing humanity in our day." The planet is warming and humans are the primary cause, particularly due to the use of fossil fuels and deforestation for agricultural purposes. A number of " scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity" (23). The document recognizes that "climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods", and laments that the poor (who are least responsible for causing the problem) are destined to be disproportionately vulnerable to its harmful effects (25).

Public policy ought to seek ways to drastically reduce carbon emissions and promote renewable sources of energy. The encyclical makes no substantial discussion of the science of global warming; instead, it simply points to the overwhelming consensus concerning the negative impact of carbon-intensive economies on the natural world and human life: "Caring for ecosystems demands farsightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation" (36).

The quality of water available to the poor is a serious concern. Water is increasingly being polluted, privatized, and wasted, which leads to problems for the poor. The earth's resources are being plundered because of "short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production." The majority of species of plant and animals that are becoming extinct are dying off for reasons related to human activity. Even some of our interventions in nature to fix what we caused further "aggravate the situation."

Environmental deterioration, current models of development and the" throwaway culture" have a detrimental effect on humans. Pollution is tied to the "throwaway culture" (the phrase "throwaway culture" appears five fives in the encyclical) that ruthlessly consumes, exploits, and discards human life and our natural resources. Cities are becoming too large — "We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature." Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness and pre-emptive action. Deterioration of the human and natural environments is connected, and both disproportionately hurt

the poor. To fix environmental problems we have to also fix "human and social degradation. "Imbalances in population density are a concern, but the primary problem is "extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some" rather than population growth. He forthrightly dismisses the idea that population growth is to blame for environmental damage; such a suggestion is often a way of refusing to reduce overconsumption by the affluent. The document challenges those that in the face of ecological degradation, would "blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism" (50).

Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries and an "ecological debt" exists between the Global North and South. Poor countries (which often have natural resources) fuel the development of richer nations. This is "connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time" (51). For this reason, nations have "differentiated responsibilities" when it comes to climate change. The world needs an international legal framework to "set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems" but, so far, the "international political responses" have been "weak. "Depletion of natural resources will most likely lead to new wars, "albeit under the guise of noble claims." Some countries provide positive examples of dealing with the environment but such efforts are not sufficient. The encyclical firmly posits that a truly ecological approach is also inherently social – an approach that simultaneously hears the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. The social and environmental impacts of mining are cited as a prime example of this. Later on, the encyclical states that abortion can never be viewed as a justification for the protection of nature. Two extremes of opinion become evident in fixing the environment: (1) Ecological problems will be solved by new technology, and (2) population should be reduced to prevent ecological harm. We need a dialogue that finds "viable future scenarios" between these extremes. Greater investment needs to be made in research aimed at understanding more fully the functioning of ecosystems and adequately analyzing the different variables associated with any significant modification of the environment.

In the above perspective, he indicts our omnipresent "media and digital world" that most often prevent us from living wisely and also the all-pervasive "techno-economic paradigm" of the last two hundred years that emphasizes above all things efficiency, speed, technology, commoditisation of goods and services, and quick and easy profit.

"But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves" (34).

While it seems that we lack a culture and leadership to confront this cultural crisis, this chapter ends with the Pope asking us to cast off the distractions that dull our consciousness, listen the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, and begin to dialogue about solutions.

4.3 Caretakers of Creation

After the Pope's diagnostic chapter about what's happening to our "common home," the second chapter of the Pope's encyclical, "The Gospel of Creation", argues that faith convictions can and should motivate Christians to assume their responsibility as caretakers of creation:

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us…. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.

It is often the case that many Christians feel that environmental stewardship is secondary or tangential to living out the faith, but the Pope wants to wipe this sentiment away. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations" (67) The earth was here before us and it has been given to us by God. "Dominion" over the earth is not an excuse for "unbridled exploitation" but rather a command to be stewards of natural resources.

The word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature", for it has to do with God's loving plan in which "every creature has its own value and significance." Pope Francis acknowledges "that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant… Nonetheless, science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both" (62) for solving environmental problems.

Nevertheless the rich scriptural traditions of Christianity holds the belief that God created everything with intrinsic goodness (65, 69); that humans are uniquely created and called to exercise responsible stewardship over creation on behalf of the loving Creator (67-68) and that all creation is a mystery, the diversity and unity of which, both reflect and mediate the Creator (76-92). On the issue of right to private property Pope says it is not "absolute or inviolable" but "subordinate[ed] … to the universal destination of goods" (93). Affirming his faith in the Christian belief, he says that the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ" (99). This chapter primarily surveys the rich scriptural traditions to show that there is no biblical justification for "a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures." (68). Likewise, there is no room for misanthropic versions of environmentalism since reverence for nature is only authentic if we have compassion for fellow humans. A person who is truly concerned about the trafficking of endangered species is automatically concerned with the trafficking of humans. The biblical narratives have much to say about the relationship of human beings with the world. Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships—with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself—yet these relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us, by sin. While all of these relationships have been riddled by

brokenness in our assertion of power and dominion, our particular calling as people of faith is for wholeness, reconciliation, and peace. This calling will in effect challenge us to be the kind of people who will not let the earth be despoiled and people forgotten. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became broken and conflicted. Perhaps most fundamentally, the pope emphasizes that environmental harm is caused by sin understood as broken relationships "with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (66). These relationships are broken in part because humans "presume to take the place of God and refuse to acknowledge our creaturely limitations"– a dynamic that causes us to mistake God's command for humans to "have dominion" over creation (Genesis 1:28) as exploitative license rather than a vocation to "cultivate and care for" God's good gift of creation (Genesis 2:15)..

Every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective that takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. Private property is not absolute or inviolable. The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and "the first principle of the whole ethical and social order". Humans are "linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family." Concern for the environment needs to be joined to a "sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."The natural environment is a collective good. We break the commandment "Thou shall not kill" means when "twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive."

The Pope also meditates on the mystery of the universe, which he sees as a continuing revelation of the divine, "a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all" (76). It is our faith in Christ that "allows us to interpret the meaning and mysterious beauty of what is unfolding" (79). Referencing the medieval Franciscan thinker St. Bonaventure, Pope Francis points to an ancient understanding of the world as the "book of creation," God's precious book "whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe" (85). In this way, the Pope asks us to re-learn how to "read" Creation in order to discover the message and meaning inherent within it. One of the key messages that Pope Francis reads in the "book of creation" is that we are "linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family" (89). In another place, he echoes this by saying that in God's created order "everything is connected" (91).

The Pope ends this chapter with reference to Jesus who embodies the tenderness, the contemplative awareness, the in-touch-ness with nature and people, the wonder and awe before God's gifts, and the reconciliation that the Creator so desires for all of Creation.Jesus was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty of creation because he himself was in constant touch with nature. "From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy." The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which "has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things." All creation is thus moving toward a "common point of arrival"—back to the Creator. Hence each creature has its own purpose. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him.

4.4 Ecological Crisis in Stasis

Chapter three entitled, "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis", further explicates the Pope's exploration for why we are where we are in our ecological crisis. The problem to be explicated is aptly summarised in a few statements in the beginning of this chapter:

"It can be said that many problems of today's world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society The effects of imposing this model on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment, but this is just one sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life. We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups" (107).

First of all, it must be reiterated that the Pope's vision of our relationship with Creation is rooted in a traditional Catholic interpretation of Scripture, theology of creation, and theological anthropology. Throughout chapter three, Pope refers back to this holistic vision and uses it as a lens through which to see and interpret the "human roots of the ecological crisis." In this context, Pope Francis examines the twin notions of what it calls the "technocratic paradigm" and a "modern anthropocentrism" borne out of a view that sees nature as a mere given, devoid of any spiritual or transcendental value.

Pope Francis criticizes the "technocratic paradigm" which "accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings" and wherein "finance overwhelms the real economy" of human flourishing (109). The way of understanding human life and activity from within the dominant technocratic paradigm has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us. Technology is not only good, but it is also powerful and increases our power. However we must not mistake that every increase in power is an increase of progress. We need a "culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint." Humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an "undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm." We should also note that science and technology is not neutral. Many environmental problems stem from the tendency to make the method and aim of science and technology an "epistemological paradigm" which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society.

We need to "slow down and look at reality in a different way," so that we can "appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made" and "recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur."Pope Francis points most directly to the "dominant technocratic paradigm" as the root of our crisis and the breakdown of a holistic vision of humanity and creation. Acknowledging that we are beneficiaries of the technological change of the last two hundred years, Pope Francis, nevertheless, sees a dark side to this so-called "progress." The tremendous power, even dominance, of the world in the hands of technocratic human beings is both amazing and risky. It is

risky precisely because of the Pope's basic anthropological vision: we are sinful people and have not proven to use power well. But it is also risky because this technological growth has not been "accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience" (105). In other words, using technology for noble ends requires an ethical framework, a spiritual culture, and a vision of the purpose of life, none of which our world seems to exude.

Thus, what we are left with in this technocratic paradigm is this rather dark, ambiguous world where we look to gain control and mastery over all objects that serve one's own immediate interests (106, 122); where we seek to exploit resources as if they are unlimited in order to gain more advantage and power (106, 109, 116); where we believe that science and technology, and market forces will solve all problems, that they provide the very meaning of existence (109, 110); where we operate within a highly specialized, fragmented, superficial, and rationalistic framework of knowledge (110, 117, 120); where we ignore any objective, natural order and begin to push boundaries of research and creativity (123, 131-134); and where we focus exclusively on economic profit for a few and ignore humanity's search for meaning through work, the complexity of ecosystems and regional economies, and the plight of poor and future generations (134-135).). Pope Francis Affirms traditional Catholic teaching that "by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion" and must be regulated when it fails to protect and promote the common good.

While the stark picture of the world might leave one feeling pessimistic about our common home, Pope also fills the chapter with repetitious challenges to humanity "to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries" (121). He is not asking us to return to the Stone Age, but he is asking us to look at reality from our spiritual vision, recover the values and goals of our tradition, and with freedom and beauty, "to generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm" (111, 114). The need of the hour is "to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made… to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur." (114). These notions have led to the misplaced ideas that the earth's resources are infinite and that economic growth and technology alone can solve global hunger and poverty. In reality, however, a purely materialistic view of reality has not only resulted in disregard for the environment, but also undermined the worth of a human life, especially those forms viewed as having little or no utility – human embryos, the poor, or people with disabilities. At the heart of consumerist and profit-driven economic ideologies is a wrong-footed idea of dominion. The result is exploitation, and a "throwaway" attitude towards nature and human life itself. The encyclical calls for a bold cultural revolution in our attitude to development and progress.

Pope Francis points to a couple creative examples of this new synthesis: a) cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production and b) Christians opting for non-consumerist models of life, recreation, and community (112). These efforts and others will no doubt feel countercultural in today's world, but Pope Francis has helped individuals with good will to see that perhaps there's no greater call to Christians today than to discern what is essentially Christian to do.

Pope Francis criticizes "anthropocentricism," i.e., the belief that humans are radically separate from and above the non-human natural world (115-118). He points out that anthropocentricism devalues creation and leads to "practical relativism", which values creation only to the extent that it is useful to humans (118, 122). Modern anthropocentrism prizes technical thought over reality by seeing creation as mere raw material for our use. This has affected many areas of life: "When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities … it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself. He reiterates the interconnectedness of all creation and, as such, connects care for creation to the protection of human life and dignity -- especially regarding abortion, the poor, those with disabilities and testing on "living human embryos" (117, 120, 137).

A misguided anthropocentrism—particularly our culture of relativism—leads to a misguided lifestyle. When human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative.

We can't make general judgments about genetic modification (GM), whether vegetable or animal, medical or agricultural. Still, there are a number of significant difficulties with GM that should not be underestimated (e.g., destroying the complex network of ecosystems). An integral ecology needs to take account of the value of human labour and a correct understanding of work. Civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production. To ensure economic freedom from which all can effectively benefit, restraints occasionally have to be imposed on those possessing greater resources and financial power.

4.5 Integral Vision to Address Global Crisis

After a substantial critique of our "technocratic paradigm" in chapter three, Pope Francis now presents an alternative vision capable of addressing every aspect of the global crisis. "We urgently need certain humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment" (141). He calls this vision an "integral ecology one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions" (137).This manifests a theme that he has been repeating throughout the encyclical. Rooted in Christian theology (as shown in chapter two) and environmental studies, this part of the encyclical charts a path to recapture awareness of the interconnectedness of creation.

Pope Francis presents the concept of integral ecology which asserts that "it cannot be emphasized enough how everything [in creation] is interconnected" (138). This, he says, is true of all creation of which humanity is a part, as well as the various aspects of human life: academics, economics, health, governance, culture and every part of "daily life" (139-155). He reiterates that care for creation is intimately connected to the promotion of a preferential option for the poor since those with the least are most harmed by ecological degradation

(158). He affirms that in the light of ecological degradation and climate change, justice and solidarity, i.e., commitment to the common good must be understood as "intergenerational" (159).

Since everything is closely interrelated, it is essential to be aware of the impact of environmental degradation on "cultural ecology", such as those social networks and ways of life which are bound up with the environment in which communities are placed. Another way of putting it is that when scientists look at the way nature works (from big concepts like time and space to the smallest realities of study like subatomic particles), they do not see things acting independent from each other. They instead see relationships (and network of relationships) between living organisms and their environment. Although we usually function without being aware of it, we always depend on larger systems for our own existence (138-140). This relational aspect of nature causes scientists then to seek only comprehensive and integrated explanations or solutions. Chapter four unpacks what this comprehensive, integrated, and relational vision might look like if we applied its principles to our complex, global crises.

The whole chapter is filled with examples of realities usually considered in isolation but should rather be brought together and seen in a more comprehensive, integral view: the relationship of global economics with local cultures, customs, and values (143-146); the relationship between our living spaces (like the architecture of our homes and the design of our neighbourhoods and cities), our daily life, and our own behaviour/happiness (147-154); the relationship of the way we think about our bodies and the way we think about the rest of creation (155); and the relationship of our current generation with future generations (159-162).

Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. When we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society that lives in it. We ourselves are a part of nature. Therefore, the social and environmental crises are intertwined. We need an "economic ecology" capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality. The analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the "analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, or from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment." Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment

Ecology also involves protecting the "cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense." But our consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety that is the heritage of all humanity. We must look for solutions that include local people from within their proper culture showing special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. The disappearance of a culture can be as serious as the disappearance of species of a plant or an animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems.

Authentic development must take into consideration the settings in which people live their lives. We must keep this in mind when designing buildings, cities, public spaces, etc. Human ecology also includes the relationship between human life and the moral law. Also, we must value our "own body in its femininity or masculinity." It is not a healthy attitude which would seek "to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it". Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. Owing to current injustices, the common good requires solidarity with and a preferential option for the poor. The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. Our approach to environmental problems must take this into account.

This chapter thus leaves the reader thinking that solutions to our global crises can no longer be credible that do not respect the relational and integral realities that are part of the way things work. For Pope Francis, the only solution is one that "demands an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (139).

4.6 The Need for International Collective Action

The previous chapters of Pope Francis' encyclical offered a more diagnostic look at our state of our planet. They emphasized the human, economic, and cultural causes of the crises before us – from pollution and climate change to consumerism and the impoverishment of people. The previous chapters also outlined some core themes from the Christian faith tradition and from recent scientific studies on the subject that could offer some way forward in rethinking how we live on the planet in a more life-giving and integrated manner.

Chapters five and six now begin to outline more concrete steps and opportunities for dialogue which, as Pope Francis says, "…can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction" (163). The fifth chapter, "Lines of Approach and Action", sets out various international collective actions needed focussing on the political and economic paths for dialogue. A guiding principle of the chapter is the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity, which teaches that challenges should be addressed at the lowest possible level of society in order to protect and promote the common good.

Human beings used their ingenuity to bring about enormous technological progress in the world. However this very same progress has "…so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide. A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries." (164) The interdependence of humanity obliges us to think of "one world with a common plan".

Pope Francis calls for the immediate replacement of "technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas" (165). He admonishes that "until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the lesser of two evils or find short-term solutions" (165). Buying and selling "carbon credits" is not the right solution. Carbon credits are criticized as "an expedient which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors." (171). He stresses the imperative of switching from fossil fuels to renewables, with the use of government subsidies which allow developing countries to get "access to technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources,"(171) wherever

possible or appropriate. The international community needs to find a way to make this happen. Enforceable international agreements and global regulatory norms are urgently needed.

Pope Francis notes the "need for common and differentiated responsibilities" among nations and quotes the bishops of Bolivia who said: "the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility of providing a solution to the problems they have caused" (170). The fact is that the international community has not been able to agree on how such a transition to more renewable energy can be made. Here Pope Francis challenges us to move from a place of irresponsibility to a state of generous and noble dialogue. There is an urgent need to develop "more efficiently organized international institutions" to address poverty, global warming, biodiversity and the oceans through international agreements and legislation. Francis refers throughout the chapter to a number of global meetings where countries have in fact come together and put the global common good above national interests through negotiations, treaties, and public commitments. He challenges nations and their leaders to move beyond short-term gain and results to what he calls "true statecraft," that is when leaders "uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good" (178, 181).

In any discussion about a proposed venture, a number of questions need to be asked in order to discern whether or not it will contribute to genuine integral development: What will it accomplish? Why? Where? When? How? For whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how? Profit cannot be the sole criterion to be taken into account. Reaching consensus is not easy and the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics.

He also challenges the economic sector to move beyond thinking about maximization of profit at the expense of our planet and the poor. The market should serve life in the Church's long-standing teaching about the economy. Thus, investing for a more life-giving future will require, according to the Pope, creativity in coming up with models of development, a redefinition of our notion of progress, and a farsighted and interdisciplinary approach (189-198).He cites the virtues of "honesty, courage, and responsibility" as what will be required of leaders in order to move forward into a positive future (169).

These issues need to be addressed not only at the international level, but at the local and national level as well. Political and institutional frameworks need to promote best practices and avoid bad practices. Political activity on the local level could also be directed to modifying consumption, developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling, protecting certain species and planning a diversified agriculture and the rotation of crops.

We need greater transparency to access the environmental impact of business ventures and projects. Environmental impact assessment should be included in the planning stages. A consensus should always be reached between the different stakeholders, who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions, and alternatives. The local population, though, should have a special place at the table. However, there are no uniform recipes, because each country or region has its own problems and limitations.

"Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy." Politics and economy should serve human life. The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria that "continue to rule the world." Production does not always fairly assign value. We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest "problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals." We can't rely on those focused on "maximizing profits" to fix the problem.

Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. For new models of progress to arise, there is a need to change "models of global development". The principle of the maximization of profits reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy. We need a politics that is "capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis. "Politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation. They need to own up to their mistakes and find ways to join together to promote public good.

Empirical science can't explain the whole of reality. We need also to look at the ethical and spiritual resources produced by the world's religions. The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers, and they need to dialogue with each other and with science on these issues. Pope Francis also calls for dialogue in which the marginalized are especially enabled to participate (183) and emphasizes the "precautionary principle" such that "if objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof" (186).

4.7 Educational Practices in Environmental Responsibility and Interior Conversion

The sixth chapter, "Ecological Education and Spirituality", shifts attention to the individual believer, families and communities, and invites them to make a difference in small but tangible ways to avoid the spiral of self-destruction. For this we need an environmental education that shouldn't only be focused on scientific information and consciousness-raising. "*Ecological education*" should provide information and seek to form habits which must occur everywhere in society: "at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis… political institutions and various other social groups … [and all] Christian communities" (213-214). Education in environmental responsibility can encourage us to act in way that promote the common good, such as "avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. "We s shouldn't worry that such efforts won't "change the world." They benefit society by "calling forth goodness."

Thus the final chapter turns directly to this very local reality: our own particular lifestyles, attitudes, and convictions. As he puts it in the opening paragraph, "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our

mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal" (202). A change in our lifestyle could positively influence those who "wield political, economic and social power."

If we don't personally change our attitudes and lives, the solutions to our global ecological crisis will never really arrive. Consumer choices, the cultivation of ecological virtues such as reducing wastefulness, and environmental education for the young are explained as practical steps leading to a deeper, spiritual "ecological conversion" (217) through which the follower of Christ recognizes the true worth of all created entities. Spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. Here Pope Francis calls for "personal and communal" conversion away from consumerism and "'collective selfishness,'" and invites persons toward lifestyles animated by sound ecological virtues, i.e., "good habits," that must be developed in persons by both secular and faith communities (202-215).

Pope Francis observes how easily we "get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending" (203). Rather than acting as unconscious consumers, often riddled with a feeling of emptiness and anxiety, Francis challenges us instead to adopt a lifestyle that conveys greater sobriety, namely less obsessiveness, more moderation and inner peace, and ultimately greater fulfilment (222-225). "Less is more" is a biblical mantra and a mindset, Pope Francis even suggests (222). We need profound interior conversion, whereby the effects of Christians' "encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them." A healthy relationship that develops a "serene attentiveness "to everything around us is one dimension of overall personal conversion "…which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change" (218).

As we continue to participate in the economic reality of our times, Pope Francis challenges us to see every act of consuming as a moral act that involves gifts of creation (air, land, and water) and the dignity of workers and local cultures (206). It's this kind of awareness and the small, daily gestures that flow from it that create the "culture of care" that Pope Francis imagines transforming our world (231). To Catholics this is an entreaty to live out this Christian spirituality in their everyday lives. Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion. Love—"overflowing with small gestures of mutual care"—is also civic and political. Love for society and commitment to the common good affects everyone.

The statement "God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore" (221) stands in the hallowed natural law tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas that every creature has in its nature an end, a telos, which humans should respect and honour. The intrinsic value of non-humans is noted when the encyclical states that the "ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us" but rather in the Risen Christ who embraces all things (83). Pope Francis most fittingly concludes with two prayers: "A prayer for our earth" and "A Christian prayer in union with creation."

5. Conclusion

The singularity of the Catholic Church's social teaching is that nature is not only "the setting for our life" (Benedict 48) but it includes human nature. In nature apart from human nature, we find many other natures that are different from each other. While Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" which is synonymous with society to include the entire ecosphere, the Church expands the concept of nature to include human nature. The Church deals with the individual as individual in the environment, as creatures of this world. Nature cannot be just regarded as mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and are in constant interaction with it. So, inclusion of human nature in nature can be considered as fundamental to ecocriticism that church advocates. Evernden made a significant comment on general ecocriticism for separating the human being from the environment. He says that "rather than thinking of an individual spaceman who must slurp up chunks of the world -'resources'-into his separate compartment, we must deal instead with the individual -in-environment, the individual as a component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment" (18) So protection of the environment and that of human life cannot be separated.

The second aspect of the ecocriticism that church advocates is concerned with the interconectedness of natures within the environment. In Laudato Si, Pope Francis underscores his conviction that "everything is interconnected" or interrelated (16, 42, 70, 91, 117, 138, 240), and that "we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion" (220). In the Catechism of the Catholic Church it is stated : "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self -sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other " (340). According to Heidegger, human beings live in "the fourfold," interaction, that is, fellow mortals, the earth, the sky, and the divinities.

This interconnectivity within nature necessarily entails the presence of many different natures. environment, of animals, of man and woman, and so on and so forth. It is in this context that Pope Benedict speaks of an "ecology of man", grounded on the fact that "man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will" (155)

The third distinction of l ecocriticism that *Laudato si* advocates is the attribution of a common cause to all natures. Since all natures have a common genitor, we can speak of a 'universal fraternity'in the cosmos calling for fraternal love between all creatures. Observing that "fraternal love can only be gratuitous," Pope Francis says that "this same gratuitousness inspires us to love and accept the wind, the sun and the clouds, even though we cannot control them" (228). This idea of common creator points to a sense of interconnectedness which is outside of traditional power schema.

A fourth distinction in church's conception of ecocriticism is linked to the theories around the origin of nature in general. Pope Benedict XVI in his *Caritas in Veritate*, makes the point that much harm is done to nature as a result of the varying conceptions people have about its origin. He includes the human being within nature, saying, "when nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or

evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes" (48). One's conception of the origin of nature determines one's handling of it. If one believes that nature is the result of evolution beginning with a big bang, one believes that whatever damage one inflicts will but contribute to the world's continuous evolution, whether it is positive or negative. If nature came to exist by chance, it may disappear by chance. Such conceptions lead to nature's destruction without somebody to blame. Ecclesial ecocriticism is founded on a communal father or creator of all natures. Church believes "the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos or chance, and this exalts it all the more." (77). Pope Francisis "well aware that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant, and consequently dismiss as irrational the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology" (62).

Church's conception of ecocriticism can be seen as one of the comprehensive solutions to nature's problems. In Pope Francis's analysis, as "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" (139) only comprehensive solutions that take into account the interactions within social systems and natural systems themselves are salutary options.

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