



# *DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF CARE: ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION ACCORDING TO LAUDATO SI'*

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*As seedbeds, academic institutions must be an avenue of reflection that involves different sectors of the community. The social encyclical **Laudato si'** centralizes on the theme of integral ecology, where it emphasizes interconnections, which include human and social dimensions. This paper attempts to explore **Laudato si'**'s elaboration on ecological education. While existing Catholic Social Teachings from **Rerum Novarum** until **Caritas in Veritate** address different social realities, the question on the topic of ecology, as well as teachings on the environment, has been scarcely incorporated. This paper analyzes **Laudato si'**'s conceptual elaboration of ecological education and how this conceptual elaboration provides the framework for the encyclical's vision of ecological education in the contemporary period.*

Keywords: *ecological education, ecology, Laudato si', Catholic social teaching, Pope Francis*

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Ecological education “is central to developing green citizenship and a green virtue ethic.”<sup>1</sup> It is a type of education where the child learns objective knowledge about nature and its processes and, at the same time, is able to relate to these experientially.<sup>2</sup> *Laudato si’* as the first social encyclical that centralized on ecology, makes this topic “unique in the legacy of the Catholic social teaching”<sup>3</sup> by providing a new perspective in approaching ecology and the ongoing environmental degradation in the contemporary period through ecological education. It proposes ecological education as a sustainable and necessary approach to the ongoing ecological crisis. The encyclical emphasized the importance of individual moral choices, which “links individual moral development and broader social change.”<sup>4</sup> Through ecological education, the encyclical aims to inform people that care for creation is a virtue that must be learned, practiced, and lived by individuals and society. This paper discusses ecological education with sub-chapters: 1) necessity for ecological education and 2) ecological education.

## A. THE NEED FOR ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

*Laudato si’* dedicates its sixth chapter to ecological education and spirituality. Here, the encyclical re-emphasizes the lack of awareness of common origin, mutual belongingness, and shared future

by the people.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the “need for an ethical and moral education that can cultivate solidarity and shared responsibility between individuals.”<sup>6</sup> Because of this, the encyclical identifies a lack of awareness and ecological behavior as a habit and necessity for ecological education.

### LACK OF AWARENESS

Integral ecology, as the central theme of *Laudato si’*, emphasizes that human beings must see the environment in its fuller dimensions for ethical responsibility to be formed. *Laudato si’* sees ethical responsibility as “a matter of being able to see what the problem is as much as possessing the will to respond to it.” Hence, it implies a “profound spiritual depth”<sup>7</sup> in addressing the ongoing environmental degradation. It is then understood that awareness of the crisis is “not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”<sup>8</sup> While providing a wide range of textual shreds of evidence that are consistent with scientific data and environmental research, the encyclical further calls for an integral ecological approach where these information and data are translated into habits and where these habits reflect a deep ecological conversion.

Consequently, this idea of the encyclical about why ecological education is necessary for addressing the crisis plays a significant

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, second ed., (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press), 167.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Curry discusses that straightforward information “should and easily could be a fundamental part of every child’s education to learn where his or her food (in all its kinds), water and energy come from, and how they get there, and where wastes (of all kinds) go to, and with what other effects for whom.” Additionally, this objective knowledge must be complimented by a subjective experience where the child relates himself or herself to where the “most beautiful spots are, where we feel most empowered, afraid or happy, and what we share spiritually with the animals and other people.” See Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, 167.

<sup>3</sup> Christiana Zenner Peppard, “Commentary on *Laudato si’*”, in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 515.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 219.

<sup>5</sup> In the social encyclical, *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis explains that there is a “lack of awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone.” Hence, human beings “above all who need to change.” See *Laudato si’: On Care for Our Common Home* in Pope Francis, *The Complete Encyclicals, Bulls, and Apostolic Exhortations*, 309.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, “Meeting with civil authorities, La Paz, Bolivia, July 8, 2015”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 81.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Miller, “Integral ecology: Francis’s spiritual and moral vision of interconnectedness,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 230.





role, both in the academic environment and in personal lives. Learning information about the environment, its theories, and concepts, the more that learners will be satisfied in their personal lives.<sup>9</sup> Equally important to awareness through information is how these are translated into ecological habits.

#### *ECOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR AS A HABIT*

Aside from the lack of awareness regarding the current ecological crisis, *Laudato si'* recognized also the difficulty imposed by the current market ideology, which is marked by extreme consumerism. This market ideology results in difficulty in developing ecological habits.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the encyclical remarks that the world is “faced with an educational challenge”<sup>11</sup> that must not be limited to acquiring and imparting information regarding the crisis.

*Laudato si'* notes how the lack of awareness concerning the ecological crisis is partially addressed through environmental education. According to the encyclical, environmental education evolved from being information-centered into including critiques of modern market ideologies.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, it now seeks to restore ecological equilibrium. The encyclical also envisions expanding environmental education

<sup>9</sup> The study analyzed three concepts: environmental values, pro-eco behavior, and life satisfaction. It concluded that “cognition influences behavior and life satisfaction” and that behavior “remains the element that can be most easily adapted if other two elements are solid.” See Andy Felix Jitäreanu, Mioara Mihăilă, Ciprian-Ionel Alecu, Alexandru-Drăgos, Robu, Gabriela Ignat and Carmen Luiza Costuleanu, *The Relationship Between Environmental Factors, Satisfaction with Life, and Ecological Education: An Impact Analysis from a Sustainability Pillars Perspective, Sustainability* 14, 10679.

<sup>10</sup> In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis explains that although there are “admirable efforts to protect the environment,” people “have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence, which makes it difficult to develop other habits.” See Francis, *Laudato si'*, 311.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 311.

<sup>12</sup> The encyclical, *Laudato si'*, acknowledged how environmental education “has broadened its goals” from being “mainly centered on scientific information, consciousness-raising, and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of the ‘myths’ of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset... It also seeks to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium.” See Francis, *Laudato si'*, 311-312.

where it can “leap toward the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning.” At the same time, *Laudato si'* noticed how this type of education “aimed at creating an ‘ecological citizenship’ is at times limited to providing information, and fails to instill good habits.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the encyclical advocates for a type of ecological education that informs and cultivate sound virtues for people to “make a selfless ecological commitment.”<sup>14</sup>

The need for this type of education is not only because of how environmental education becomes limited to imparting information but also due to the fact that: first, regulations are insufficient; second, individual actions are significant, and; third, the ecological crisis calls for a genuine conversion.

First, *Laudato si'*, being true to its central theme, includes the responsibility of the community, especially those concerned with its governance. The encyclical explains that “we need institutions empowered to impose penalties for damage inflicted on the environment.”<sup>15</sup> This is because the current “market ideology is a driving force behind environmental crisis.”<sup>16</sup> The encyclical mentions how the current market ideology is profit-centered and disregards damages done to the environment. Thus, aside from the awareness required to understand how to address the ongoing ecological crisis, a “global cooperative response”<sup>17</sup> is necessary. The idea of *Laudato si'* on this type of response is characterized by a farsighted agenda where “much of the action

<sup>13</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 312.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Annett, “The economic vision of Pope Francis,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Annett explains that in order to achieve an integral and sustainable development amidst the prevailing economic model, a “global cooperative response” is needed. To Annett, this global cooperative response is what *Laudato si'* explains as “Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with common plan*”, which includes “strong international agreements to govern all aspects of the global commons. See Anthony Annett, *The economic vision of Pope Francis*, 170.





will take place at the national and local levels.”<sup>18</sup> These laws do not only ensure the legal means of protecting the global commons. They also allow the people to be “motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond.”<sup>19</sup>

Second, to complement scientific information regarding the ongoing crisis and to ensure integral and human development, *Laudato si'* emphasizes forming an ecological habit through individual actions. It assures that individual actions carry a significant role both in the individual habits of a person and in the community. These individual actions that reflect an ecological behavior matter as they “link between individual moral development and broader social change.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, ecological education that integrates the participation of the community and emphasizes ecological behavior can “cultivate virtue in the areas of consumption, disposal, and transportation.”<sup>21</sup>

Third, since *Laudato si'* integrates interior conversion as equally important to information, data, and concepts regarding the ongoing ecological crisis, it also calls for an interior conversion, especially for Christians. *Laudato si'* refers to this as ecological conversion. It is described as “the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.”<sup>22</sup> Ecological conversion aligns itself with the understanding of stewardship, where Christians are called to live their “vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork” which “is essential to a life of virtue.” This ecological vocation is “not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, ecological education allows learners

to learn ecological responsibility and “see themselves as part of nature.”<sup>24</sup>

As a whole, *Laudato si'* introduces ecological education as a new perspective in approaching the ongoing ecological crisis. According to *Laudato si'*, ecological education is necessary to respond to the lack of awareness of the crisis and to develop ecological behavior as a habit. To this, the encyclical emphasizes how ecological education is needed in developing ecological habits through three points: first, because regulations are insufficient; second, because individual actions are significant; and third, because the ecological crisis calls for a genuine conversion. Thus, ecological education, as a new perspective introduced by *Laudato si'*, provided both a solution to its identified ecological crisis and an application of its central theme, integral ecology.

## B. ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The social teachings of the Catholic Church impart that the proper understanding of the environment includes the “consideration of the ‘dignity’ of all living beings.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, a correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction and absolutization of nature.<sup>26</sup> For this, the concept of ecology from *Laudato si'* differs from that of the contemporary sciences, where *Laudato si'* builds the idea of ecology within the concept of integral ecology. Applying this concept, *Laudato si'* offered

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Annett, “The economic vision of Pope Francis,” 171.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 312.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 219.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Eva Nordland, “New World – New Thinking – New Education,” in *The Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education*, edited by Betty Reardon and Eva Nordland, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 287.

<sup>26</sup> The compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church explains that a “correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited.” At the same time, understanding the environment “must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself.” See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 286.





ecological education as one of its solutions to address the ongoing environmental degradation and exploitation. Ecological education “is central to developing green citizenship and a green virtue ethic”<sup>27</sup>, where the learner receives objective knowledge complemented by subjective knowledge that develops a sense of kinship with the environment.

The sixth chapter of *Laudato si'* is dedicated to ecological education and spirituality. Here, the encyclical opens with the statement: “Many things have to change, but it is we, human beings above all, who need to change.”<sup>28</sup> Likewise, it emphasized how human beings lack an awareness of common origin, mutual belonging, and shared future.<sup>29</sup> For this, *Laudato si'* sees how the ongoing ecological crisis is a “cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge”<sup>30</sup> that demands a path of renewal, which impacts change of lifestyle, education, and genuine ecological conversion.

*Laudato si'* describes ecological education as a form of education that “can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis, and elsewhere.”<sup>31</sup> Ecological education differs from environmental education, where the latter is centered on scientific information and the prevention of environmental risks. Furthermore, Pope Francis emphasizes how a type of education that reflects about the earth is important.<sup>32</sup> The role of academic institutions as “seedbeds, places full of possibility, fertile soil to be cared for, cultivated, and protected”<sup>33</sup> implies the role of educators in

helping learners to develop “a critical sense, an open mind capable of caring for today’s world.”<sup>34</sup>

*Laudato si'* envisions ecological education as a good education that “plants seeds when we are young” and continues “to bear fruit throughout life.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, the involvement of the family, the different political institutions, Christian communities, and other social groups is vital. Pope Francis recognizes that the involvement of each of these allows different avenues of reflection.<sup>36</sup> Equally important is allowing education received in academic institutions to develop within learners “a mark of greater responsibility in the face of today’s problems, the needs of the poor, concern for the environment.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, it implies the need for “educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care.”<sup>38</sup> Without this type of pedagogy, learners will fall into seeing a university degree as only for their individual flourishing.<sup>39</sup>

Through this, the encyclical answers to the task of ecological education “to create, generate and develop the ecological culture and to teach a person to understand it.”<sup>40</sup> Further, it emphasized that there must be a “relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, ecological

Quito, July 7, 2015”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 81.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>35</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 313.

<sup>36</sup> See Pope Francis, “Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, July 7, 2015”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 312.

<sup>39</sup> In Pope Francis’ Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito on July 7, 2015, he explains how a university degree is often seen only for individual flourishing by reflecting on the question: “How do we help our young people not to see a university degree as synonymous with higher status, with more money or social prestige?” See Pope Francis, *Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, July 7, 2015*, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, 82.

<sup>40</sup> Alla Isakova, “The Concepts of Formation of Ecological Education”, *International Multidisciplinary Scientific GeoConference: SGEM*, 213.

<sup>41</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 313.

<sup>27</sup> Curry, *Ecological Ethics*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 309.

<sup>29</sup> See Francis, *Laudato si'*, 309.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>32</sup> In the address of Pope Francis to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, he explains that within the university setting, “it would be worthwhile reflecting on the way we educate about this earth of ours, which cries out to heaven.” See Pope Francis, *Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, July 7, 2015* in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 81.

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador,







education, according to *Laudato si'*, includes ecological awareness, ecological sensitivity, and ecological conversion.

#### *ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS: PERSONAL CONSUMPTION CHOICES*

Aside from detailing the ongoing degradation and exploitation of the environment and its detrimental effects, *Laudato si'* highlights how ecological awareness includes personal consumption choices. In this case, the encyclical highlights extreme consumerism as an effect of the current market ideology that people must be aware of. It notes how “the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products”<sup>42</sup>, where people are engrossed in needless buying and spending.

The critique of *Laudato si'* on the current global economic system must be seen within the context of how certain market mechanisms carry the risk of idolatry of the market.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, this form of economic system becomes unproductive and “socially destructive.” Hence, becoming “a driving force behind the environmental crisis – including pollution, climate change, water stress, and loss of biodiversity.”<sup>44</sup> This type of market ignores the detrimental impact of its actions on the environment since “they do not pay the full costs of using up shared environmental resources.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, posing as an ethical challenge in the contemporary period.<sup>46</sup> This is because

the natural resources used in sustaining these markets and how they impact the climate are part of the common good “belonging to all and meant for all.”<sup>47</sup> Considering these, it implies that individual actions, especially personal consumption choices, carry significance in the ongoing environmental degradation and exploitation.

*Laudato si'* elaborates how individual lifestyle is equally important to the regulation of the market ideology that pushes the same consumerist lifestyle. The encyclical explains how “care for nature is part of a lifestyle, which includes the capacity for living together and communion.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, “personal consumption and lifestyle choices have discernible ecological impacts that cannot be ignored.”<sup>49</sup> Individual actions are important because of their Christian moral significance<sup>50</sup> and impact on the desire-driven economy<sup>51</sup>.

First, *Laudato si'* teaches that individual actions carry a Christian moral significance because of how they impact the daily moral dealings of individuals, whether for the good or the bad. This must be considered on top of material and observable impact of personal consumption choices. Further, the encyclical explains that a consumerist attitude affects the character of the individual, which is counter-productive to the integral ecology that the encyclical establishes. Through this, the encyclical applies

<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 309.

<sup>43</sup> Annett uses the warning from Pope St. John Paul II in explaining how “real problem arises when market mechanisms are proposed as the sole answer to economic, social, and environmental problems, and... held up as the normative standard for all human activity.” Because of this, “these mechanisms carry the risk of an ‘idolatry’ of the market, an idolatry which ignores the existence of goods, which by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities.” See Anthony Annett, *The economic vision of Pope Francis*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 168.

<sup>44</sup> Annett, *The economic vision of Pope Francis*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 170.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ottmar Edenhofer and Christian Flachsland explain that *Laudato si'* “discusses key ethical challenges of the twenty-first century: climate change, poverty, and inequality” within the environmental context. See Ottmar Edenhofer and Christian Flachsland, *Laudato Si': Concern for our*

*global commons*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 177.

<sup>47</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 232.

<sup>48</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 319. (Note: *The original begins with capital C, i.e., Care...*)

<sup>49</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 218.

<sup>50</sup> DiLeo explains that one of the reasons why individual actions are important is due to the “Christian focus on the significance of individual moral choices.” See Daniel R. DiLeo, *Creation care through consumption and life choices*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 219.

<sup>51</sup> DiLeo adds that one of the reasons why individual actions are important is because of “the impact of our personal choices within an economy focused on the desires of First World consumers” and how it “links between individual moral development and broader social change.” See Daniel R. DiLeo, *Creation care through consumption and life choices*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 219.





and further reinforces the social teaching of the Church regarding the principle of the common good as well as the moderation of the right to private property. Additionally, the “Catholic tradition reinforces the theological importance of individual actions by naming as sin any action that does not express love for God or another person.”<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, individual decisions on consumption “matter ecologically and theologically” since these choices and actions “determine what sort of persons we become.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, they affect the formation of either virtue or vice of a person in the context of personal consumption choices. Thus, through these individual actions concerning personal consumption choices, individuals are able to seek “to act in harmony”<sup>54</sup> with creation while developing moral virtues. Developing moral virtues in this context allows no compromise to the core principles of Catholic social teaching.<sup>55</sup>

Second, *Laudato si'* teaches that personal consumption choices carry a profound impact on the desire-driven economy since these individual actions “have profound ecological consequences.”<sup>56</sup> This is evident through carbon dioxide emissions per individual. Hence, “individual acts are significant insofar as they harm creation”<sup>57</sup> and how these personal consumption choices contribute or not to “reorienting systems, structures, and institutions toward ecological

sustainability, justice, and human flourishing.”<sup>58</sup> For this, the encyclical reminds us how,

we must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, the encyclical identifies the culture of consumerism and the throw-away culture as a type of mindset, behavior, and consumption that results from the desire-driven economy. The encyclical warns of its collective impact on natural resources and the environment. *Laudato si'* defines the culture of consumerism as a culture “which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest”<sup>60</sup> while the individual is “caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending.”<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, throw-away culture “generates so much waste because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary.”<sup>62</sup> When individuals are influenced by these, not only their consumption choices become affected, but also their behavior.

Hence for the encyclical, equally important to personal consumption choices is the mindset of each individual. The informed choices of an individual influence their behavior: “If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, one of the “strongest messages of *Laudato si'* is that we must not allow ourselves to become beholden to a false view of the economic system as being the driving force behind human

<sup>52</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 220.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 221.

<sup>55</sup> DiLeo explains that “since the consequences of ecological harm can injure human persons – especially the poor and marginalized – we can also recognize that personal consumption and lifestyle choices are theologically significant insofar as they compromise core principles of Catholic social teaching (e.g., human life, dignity, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable).” See Daniel R. DiLeo, *Creation care through consumption and life choices*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, “Creation care through consumption and life choices,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 219.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>59</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 313. (Note: *The original begins with capital W, i.e., We...*)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>63</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 314.





pursuits.”<sup>64</sup> The encyclical reminds the people of the moral and environmental implications of personal consumption choices.

#### *ECOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY: INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION*

Integral ecology “is the central theme of *Laudato si’*.”<sup>65</sup> As a moral principle, it follows the understanding of the encyclical that “everything is connected.” Thus, the encyclical envisions the characteristic of ecological education as one that “can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis, and elsewhere.”<sup>66</sup> This vision of the encyclical for ecological education implies two things. First, is the involvement of different individuals from different sectors inside the community, and second is the type of ecological education that the learners would receive.

First, *Laudato si’* identifies the involvement and the roles of different individuals coming from the different sectors in the community as included in ecological education. Since responding to the ongoing environmental degradation and exploitation requires collective and individual actions, the encyclical emphasizes that these two are vital. This is because “educational communities play a fundamental role, an essential role in the enrichment of civic and cultural life.”<sup>67</sup> Through the involvement and examples of different sectors in the community, young people will understand how “creation is not some possession that we can lord over for our pleasure; nor, even less, is it the property of only

some people, the few.”<sup>68</sup> For this reason, *Laudato si’* elaborates that while collective actions, such as policy making, conferences, and regulation of wastes and pollutants of governments and private companies, are important in influencing long-term ecological agendas in the national and local levels<sup>69</sup>, individual actions matter through the principle of the common good. By applying the principle of the common good, *Laudato si’* elaborates that the common good “is much more than the sum of individual interests. It moves from ‘what is best for me’ to ‘what is best for everyone.’”<sup>70</sup> Thus, individual actions matter as they influence the direction of the economy and the development of a culture of care through daily gestures.

Second, *Laudato si’* envisions ecological education as a type of education that plants seeds and continues to bear fruit throughout the life of the person.<sup>71</sup> For this type of education to continue throughout the life of the person, it implies that it takes “place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis, and elsewhere.”<sup>72</sup> Hence, there is a relationship between good education and the maintenance of a healthy environment. *Laudato si’* understands this type of education as an education that can cultivate attention and augment perception so that it brings about sustained attention. This sustained attention is necessary, not only as a concept in integral ecology but also to

both overcome the structures around us that train us to ignore connections and hone our ability to see and

<sup>64</sup> Robert Brecha, “What is to be done? Climate change mitigation strategies for the next generation,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 212.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, “Integral ecology: Francis’s spiritual and moral vision of interconnectedness,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 313.

<sup>67</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, July 7, 2015,” in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 83.

<sup>68</sup> Pope Francis, “General Audience, May 21, 2014,” in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 9.

<sup>69</sup> Annett explains that in implementing agendas for the environment, “much of the action will take place at the national and local levels” where governments “are called upon to embrace a farsighted agenda.” See Anthony Annett, *The economic vision of Pope Francis*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 171.

<sup>70</sup> Pope Francis, “Meeting with civil authorities, La Paz, Bolivia, July 8, 2015,” in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, (New York: Orbis Books), 71.

<sup>71</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 313.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.







understand the ecological interconnections essential for both the survival of our species and flourishing.<sup>73</sup>

#### *ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION: DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF CARE*

Under its chapter dedicated to ecological education, *Laudato si'* emphasizes the importance of “little everyday gestures”<sup>74</sup>, which are needed in halting environmental degradation and in establishing a “culture of care, which permeates all of society.”<sup>75</sup> In order to develop this culture of care, an ecological conversion is necessary. Ecological conversion demands a change in numerous attitudes that “together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness.”<sup>76</sup>

The social encyclical, *Laudato si'*, explains ecological conversion as a “profound interior conversion,”<sup>77</sup> a kind of “*metanoia*”<sup>78</sup> that is responsive to the ongoing environmental degradation. This interior conversion addresses the passiveness and excuse of realism and pragmatism that affects the commitment of the community, especially of prayerful Christians, to respond to environmental degradation. Hence, for the encyclical, what the people “need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.”<sup>79</sup> This type of ecological conversion, then, is characterized by an awareness of the relationship of humanity with its Creator and the reconciliation of humanity with the natural environment.

First, ecological conversion entails an awareness of the relationship between humanity and

their Creator. Likewise, this awareness is also understood as a recognition and acknowledgment of the dignity of living creatures as creations of God. This acknowledgment of our ideal harmony with the Creator implies that ecological conversion must always be rooted in our harmonious relationship with the Creator since the ongoing environmental degradation is “a rebellion against God as source and mystery of all created life and our willful misuse of God’s creation.”<sup>80</sup> Hence, it also implies that “ecological conversion calls for a return to the Creator.”<sup>81</sup> This meaning of ecological conversion from the encyclical addresses not only the anthropocentric view of nature but also acknowledges that the “ecological crisis reveals how the modern ‘gods’ have displaced faith in a divine Creator and sacred respect for the order of creation.”<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, the encyclical teaches that ecological conversion reflecting the relationship of humanity with the Creator must be characterized by “gratitude and gratuitousness”, which is “a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works.”<sup>83</sup> This implies that ecological conversion applied in ecological education teaches that at the heart of addressing the ongoing environmental degradation is the acknowledgment that human beings are not the sole masters of the natural environment. Hence, it addresses the anthropocentric view of the natural environment. Likewise, this expounds on the role of human beings and the work that they do. The dignity of the work that human beings do for their individual flourishing must consider the dignity of creation and ensure its flourishing and protection, as well. Thus,

<sup>73</sup> Miller, “Integral ecology: Francis’s spiritual and moral vision of interconnectedness,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si'*, 26.

<sup>74</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 320.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>77</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 314.

<sup>78</sup> Joshthrom Kurethadam, “*Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology*, (New York: Orbis Books), 359.

<sup>79</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 314-315.

<sup>80</sup> Frederick Quinn, *To Heal the Earth: A Theology of Ecology* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1994), 25.

<sup>81</sup> Kurethadam, “*Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology*, 359.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>83</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 316.





ecological conversion as an awareness of the relationship of humanity with the Creator is the acknowledgment of the dignity of the creation and ensures the flourishing and protection of the natural environment.

Second, ecological conversion entails a good relationship between human beings and the natural environment. The encyclical also sees this as part of its hope for humanity and the natural environment: “Yet all is not lost.”<sup>84</sup> This is why ecological conversion as a characteristic applied in ecological education “entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith.”<sup>85</sup> This responsibility includes not only the natural environment but also the human relationships present within the environment.

*Laudato si'*, in its identification of the ongoing environmental degradation and its causes, concludes the interrelation between the human and natural environment: “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.”<sup>86</sup> Further, this notion of ecological conversion from *Laudato si'* allows receivers of ecological education to see not only the manifestations<sup>87</sup> and possible solutions of the ongoing environmental degradation but to also understand the importance of how one’s behavior affects the attitudes towards the environment and other people. For this to be realized, an ecological conversion rooted in Christian spirituality is necessary.

This Christian spirituality, according to *Laudato si'*, is a rich heritage and the “fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal

experience”<sup>88</sup> that the Catholic church has to offer and contribute to the renewal of humanity. Renewal of humanity is necessary because of the anthropogenic behavior of humanity, which causes ongoing environmental degradation and the distorted relationship of humanity with the natural environment. Hence, the environmental degradation carries an anthropogenic character. The identified ecological problems, environmental degradation, and environmental exploitation “are reflections of humanity’s disharmonious relationship with our common home.”<sup>89</sup> As a solution, the encyclical identifies the need for a sustained ecological commitment that carries this type of spirituality while aiming to address the ongoing environmental degradation. Thus, an ecological education that carries Christian spirituality allows not only the development of ecological behavior but, at the same time, it allows a sustainable ecological commitment that carries a spirit of generous care and tenderness.

Consequently, *Laudato si'* through ecological conversion and Christian spirituality, the encyclical envisions ecological education as a type of education that can bring “new self-awareness capable of offering guidance and direction,”<sup>90</sup> surpassing the scientific approach of environmental education. Thus, the framework for ecological education, according to the encyclical, *Laudato si'*, must aim to restore ecological equilibrium and to establish harmony within humanity, with nature, with other living creatures, and with God.<sup>91</sup>

The need to frame ecological education in this manner speaks of the fact that “it is not enough to analyze and describe reality: there is a need to shape environments of creative thinking, discussions that develop alternatives to current

<sup>84</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 310.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>87</sup> See chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>88</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, 315.

<sup>89</sup> Kureethadam, “*Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology*,” 213.

<sup>90</sup> Kureethadam, “*Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology*,” 309.

<sup>91</sup> See Francis, *Laudato si'*, 312.





problems.”<sup>92</sup> Likewise, “young people’s interest in nature protection problems counts as one of the most important means of developing social responsibility” since it is “evident that an ordinary human being looks upon even urgent political problems as something abstract.”<sup>93</sup> Hence, through ecological education, an awareness that the protection of nature and its survival is closely connected with the survival of humanity. Through this, ecological education will not only be limited to raising awareness of the scientific and descriptive information regarding environmental degradation and its possible solutions but also on how to further develop a behavior towards a genuine ecological commitment that goes a step further from personal initiatives towards viewing reality as interconnected.<sup>94</sup> Aside from identifying the necessary considerations for ecological education, *Laudato si’* elaborates on how the development of care for the environment impacts the individual, the environment, and the community.

#### PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

With ecological awareness, ecological sensitivity, and ecological conversion as the framework of ecological education according to *Laudato si’*, the encyclical sees the fullness of life as the effects of this type of education, which reflects through behavior, contemplative lifestyle, and personal choices: “It is not a lesser life or one

lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.”<sup>95</sup> This is evident through the relationships between humanity, the environment, and society.

First, for the relationship between humanity and the environment, *Laudato si’* elaborates that by living a contemplative lifestyle, one can live freely and consciously. This allows humanity to “experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them.”<sup>96</sup> Hence, the effect of ecological education on humanity becomes the actualization of human ecology from the integral ecology of *Laudato si’*, where people are called to cultivate and to care. Since “cultivating and caring for creation is an instruction of God,”<sup>97</sup> it highlights the relationship of humanity with the environment, human relations, and the vocation of humanity as stewards of creation, especially through cultivation and care, humanity is able to acknowledge the Creator as well as the task entrusted to them. Secondly, “cultivating and caring do not only entail the relationship between us and the environment... They also concern human relations.” Hence, through learning to cultivate and care for the natural environment, humanity is able to build up the space that God gifted to humanity together and further learn to be “attentive to the world in which we live”<sup>98</sup> – to care and to protect the natural environment, and to care for one another.<sup>99</sup> Thirdly, through cultivation and care humanity realizes their

<sup>92</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, July 7, 2015”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vignini, 81.

<sup>93</sup> Sergei Polozov, “Social Responsibility and Ecological Culture through Ecological Education”, in *Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education*, edited by Betty Reardon and Eva Nordland, (New York: State University of New York Press), 100.

<sup>94</sup> In his Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito, Pope Francis explains that “personal initiatives are always necessary and good. But we are asked to go one step further: to start viewing reality in an organic and not fragmented way, to ask about where we stand in relation to others, since ‘everything is interconnected’.” See Francis, *Address to the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito*, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vignini, 83-84. (Note: *The original begins with capital B, i.e., Personal...*)

<sup>95</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 317.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Francis, “General Audience, June 5, 2013”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vignini, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Pope Francis, “Homily at the Island of Lampedusa, July 8, 2013”, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vignini, 7.

<sup>99</sup> In the homily of Pope Francis at the Island of Lampedusa on July 8, 2013, the Pope explains how one’s attentiveness to the world is significant in how one cares for another: “We are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don’t care; we don’t protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another!” See Pope Francis, *Homily at the Island of Lampedusa, July 8, 2013*, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vignini, 7.





vocation as stewards of creation. Pope Francis elaborates that the vocation of being stewards of creation does not involve Christians alone, it also has a dimension that involves everyone. Further, for Pope Francis, it means taking care of other people, of our own families, and everything that has been entrusted to the protection of humanity.<sup>100</sup> Thus, allowing the realization of an integral human development for the flourishing of humanity and the natural environment.

Second, the actualization of the effects of ecological education allows authentic development within the community that is characterized by social love. This authentic development makes “society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural,” and where social love is the “constant and highest norm for all activity.”<sup>101</sup> Since ecological education positively contributes toward human relations and the relationship of humanity with the natural environment, “it follows, then, that a ‘good society’ is one in which everyone can flourish without exception or exclusion.”<sup>102</sup> Specifically, the community “can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism,” and be replaced with community actions that “show concern for a public place” and where “relationships develop or are recovered.”<sup>103</sup> From this, the encyclical sees the impact of these where “the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity.”<sup>104</sup> This is the reason why the “notion of ‘ecological conversion’ combines

the task of personal education and ‘interior conversion,’” and where the “social dimension of conversion includes not simply concern for the poor, but conversion toward the poor.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, acknowledging others and their experiences regardless of their status is the central response to environmental justice within the context of preferential options for the poor.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, *Laudato si’* hopes that through ecological education, people will be able to live a contemplative lifestyle and experience the authentic development of the community. A contemplative lifestyle allows people to live freely and consciously, guided away from pride of dominating and possessing. Through this lifestyle, people carry an attitude of wonder and contemplation, able to cultivate and care for the environment. On the other hand, the authentic development of the community is characterized by social love, where society becomes more human and worthy of humans. This is understood as a good society where everyone flourishes without exception or exclusion. Consequently, this is seen as a conversion towards the poor through environmental justice.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, *Laudato si’* introduces ecological education as a new perspective in approaching the ongoing ecological crisis. According to *Laudato si’*, ecological education is necessary because of the lack of awareness of the crisis and to develop ecological behavior as a habit. Firstly, ecological education assists in

<sup>100</sup> In the Inaugural Homily of Pope Francis on March 19, 2013, the Pope explained that being a caretaker means “caring for people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need... It means caring for one another in our families... It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it.” See *Pope Francis Inaugural Homily, March 19, 2013*, in *Care for creation: a call for ecological conversion*, edited by Giuliano Vigini, 5.

<sup>101</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 319.

<sup>102</sup> Annett, “The economic vision of Pope Francis,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 166. (Note: The original begins with capital I. i.e., It follows...)

<sup>103</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’*, 320.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>105</sup> María Teresa Dávila, “The option for the poor in *Laudato Si’*: Connecting care of creation with care for the poor,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 152-153.

<sup>106</sup> In María Teresa Dávila’s work, she elaborates that: “Acknowledgement of the other – the racial, religious, ethnic, political, and economic other – and their experience must be a central dimension of a response to environmental justice grounded on the preferential option for the poor.” See *María Teresa Dávila, The option for the poor in Laudato Si’: Connecting care of creation with care for the poor*, in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato si’*, 153.







filling the gap by making people aware of the current ecological crisis. Secondly, ecological education, according to *Laudato si'*, must not focus on amassing information but, most importantly, is that this information is translated into habits. Hence, *Laudato si'* envisions ecological education as a good education that plants seeds and continues to bear fruit throughout life. It allows education received in academic institutions to develop learners with a mark of greater responsibility characterized by ecological awareness, ecological sensitivity, and ecological conversion. The encyclical hopes that through ecological education, people will be able to live a contemplative lifestyle and experience the authentic development of the community.

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