



ANTHROPOCENTRISM AS AN ECOLOGICAL FALLACY: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL MUSINGS ON *LAUDATO SI*

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We live in the midst of an ecological crisis. Mother Earth is like a ticking time bomb that will eventually explode if we do not take urgent and drastic measures to save her. We only have one planet, our common home.

The author posits that the cause of the environmental problems that we are experiencing is our anthropocentric mindset, where we think that the world is at our disposal. We harness, nay, exploit, our physical resources in the belief that we are being commanded to “subdue” the earth as mentioned in the book of Genesis of the Judaeo-Christian Bible. However, it is only a half-truth since the same Bible also tells us to “keep” the earth.

There are many well-meaning environmental thinkers who advocate ecocentrism which puts premium on the intrinsic worth and value of the whole of creation. Their ideas concur what the papal encyclical Laudato Si spells out in succinct terms about the decrepit state of our planet, the causes and effects especially on poor people and poor countries which are experiencing the brunt of climate change and global warming.

Being plagued by enormous problems on environmental degradation, the author calls into action the stakeholders of the educational institutions to come up with ways and means on how to cultivate ecological consciousness especially on the part of their students. After all, it is to them that we bequeath the world that we are living.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, creation, Deep Ecology, ecocentrism, ecological crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The spheres in which the world of relation exists are three. First, our life with nature. There the relation sways in gloom beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as Thou, our words cling to the threshold of speech. Second, our life with men.... Third, our life with intelligible forms... (Buber, 1970).

Man lives in a world surrounded by animate and inanimate creatures. He co-exists with them day in and day out. Every waking moment, man relates with his fellowmen and interconnects with nature. It is best to be optimistic and positive about man's relationship with other creatures. However, there is a felt need for a lot of improvement in matters of interpersonal relations between man and man, as stated in *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis, 2020), and with other creatures, both living and non-living, of the natural world as mentioned in *Laudato Si* (Pope Francis, 2015).

From October 22, 2024 to November 17, 2024, the Philippines experienced six weather disturbances. There was Kristine (Severe Tropical Storm Trami, October 22), Leon (Typhoon Kong-rey, October 27), Marce (Typhoon Yinxing, November 7), Nika (Typhoon Toraji, November 11), Ofel (Typhoon Usagi, November 14) and Pepito (Tropical Cyclone Man-yi, November 16).¹ These calamitous typhoons that came one after the other only show one thing – climate change is undeniable, says Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a Filipino climate justice activist.² While this article is written there is currently COP29 being held in Azerbaijan from Nov. 11 – 22, 2024. This Conference of the Parties 29th is organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.³

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/philippines-six-tropical-cyclones-humanitarian-snapshot-20-october-present-13-november-2024>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/15/philippines-weather-typhoon-yinxing-toraji-usagi>

³ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a treaty whereby nations look for ways and means on how to address climate change. Practically, all nations signed it.

Buber (1970) believes that our relationship with nature sways in gloom. Indeed, the world that we live in is gloomy, dark, and frightening. “*The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth*” (LS ¶21). With the current ecological problems that we have, the world that we live in now is in a state of environmental crisis. We are experiencing global warming, extinction of species, and climate change. We destroy our land and forests, thus affecting the balance of our ecosystem. Air and water pollution is rampant, so people buy clean air in canisters⁴ and purified water in bottles. Our current predicament is quite alarming. Man is increasingly destroying “the bed of his life” and thus threatening his survival (Donev, 2019).

Lynn White (1967) opines that “*at the root of the prevailing social paradigm lies the image of a man opposed to nature; the image of a man and nature remaining at war with each other*”. Our problem is not just environmental, not even economic or political. It is metaphysical and why not, theological. The way we relate with and treat other animate or inanimate creatures manifests a kind of philosophic frame of mind that lies deep in our psyche. This mindset underlies how we think of ourselves, our fellowmen, other creatures in nature, and even God. In the Buberian language, we either treat them as a “Thou” or as an “It”. Ken Wilber (2000) concurs with this view when he propounds that the *environmental crisis is due primarily to a fractured worldview*.

This paper hopes to elucidate man's theoretical framework which leads us to our present ecological crisis that has alarmed the Church to the point that Pope Francis wrote the encyclical letter *Laudato Si*. The message of this document couldn't be much clearer when we glean its subtitle “On Care for our Common Home”

⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/15/asia/china-canadian-company-selling-clean-air/index.html>





which, sadly, *is falling into serious disrepair* (LS ¶61).

ANTHROPOCENTRISM: MAN'S DOMINION OVER NATURE

Laudato Si expressly mentions the concept of anthropocentrism⁵ in paragraphs 68 and 69, where it says, “Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (¶68). The said document gave a further explanation of why it is unacceptable:

The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must, therefore, respect the particular goodness of every creature to avoid any disordered use of things” (¶69).

The encyclical used the adjectives “tyrannical” and “distorted” in qualifying the kind of anthropocentrism that is abjectly objected to by this document. Is there an acceptable version of such a concept? Better yet, how has it become tyrannical and distorted? A cursory look at the history of the concept is in order to better understand how has it evolved into its present adverse (mis)understanding.

The term anthropocentrism⁶ is composed of two Greek words that mean “human” and “center”. Easily, it means putting man at the very center of

all worldly affairs and activities, social, Political and economic programs and projects. This is based on the understanding that man is the highest of all creatures, having been endowed with a rational soul, which sets him apart from other organic and non-organic species. Being such, humans think of themselves as superior to the rest of creation in terms of rights, needs, interests, and even morals, and as a result, man believes that he is the master of nature and can use it in whatever way he wants to promote his own welfare (Beckmann et al., 1997). Gribben and Fagan (2016) remark that those who adhere to anthropocentrism favor any activities that would be beneficial to human beings, even if there is a concomitant adverse effect on the environment. All that these people think about is how to promote human well-being, no matter what the costs are to the environment. In this regard, this is what *Laudato Si* condemns to be tyrannical and distorted. The last two lines of the foregoing passage very clearly exhort man to respect each and every creature as they reflect in their own beings a shadow of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness.

While anthropocentrism is a philosophical viewpoint, it also has its basis in theology, specifically from a biblical point of view – the Creation story. Hoffmann and Sandelands (2004), in their article entitled *Getting Right with Nature: Anthropocentrism, Ecocentrism, and Theocentrism* cited historian Lynn White as saying that the ecological problems that man is facing today are caused by his Christian attitudes where he thinks of himself as superior to nature and to be contemptuous of it and willing to use it for his whims and caprices. This viewpoint is premised on the biblical passage in Genesis 1:28, which says, “God blessed them, and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl

⁵ Campbell (1983) claims that the term anthropocentric was coined in the 1860s in the course of Charles Darwin’s controversial theory of evolution which posits the notion that man is the center of the universe.

⁶ The question that the researcher raised earlier on how anthropocentrism, with its accompanying preferential valuing of humanity over non-humanity, has become tyrannical and distorted is a valid point. Kyle Burchett (2014) claims that the concept can be thought of in two distinct forms. He calls the first one ethical egoism since it tolerates humanity’s selfish behavior that would give short-term benefits to individuals but jeopardizes long-term sustainability. The second one is genuine anthropocentrism, which takes into account human activities that are in keeping with short-term and long-term benefits and sustainability. The former is called strong anthropocentrism, and the latter is referred to as weak anthropocentrism.





on the earth” (The New American Bible, 2002). In the same article, Hoffmann and Sandelands (2004) quoted historian John Passmore who writes that this particular passage has been read by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike and took it as man’s charter, which gives him all the rights to subdue the earth and those that inhabit therein. Joseph Des Jardins (1992), in his book *Environmental Ethics*, expressly writes:

That perspective, developing from biblical sources like the preceding passage taken from Genesis, is especially anthropocentric. In this view, humans occupy a privileged position in all creation. Being created in the “image and likeness of God,” they have a moral and metaphysical uniqueness. Humans are separate from, and transcend, nature. God has created a moral hierarchy in which humans are superior to nature and have been commanded by God to subdue and dominate it.

Our environmental crisis is due to some philosophical and theological viewpoints, thus affecting how we look at, interact with, and relate to nature.⁷

After the theological aspect of anthropocentrism has been exposed, albeit very briefly, at this point we now shift our focus to the philosophical component of this attitude. The author believes that for a change of attitude on how we deal with nature to come about in order to preserve and conserve our bed of life we ought to grasp what constitutes our mental framework.

The preceding direct quote speaks of man’s moral and metaphysical uniqueness, which makes him superior and thus puts him atop the hierarchy of created beings. This mentality can be traced as far back as Aristotle who puts man on a pedestal, over and above other sentient beings,

⁷ Nolt (2010) refers nature to those parts and aspects of the world which are neither human nor products of humanity. These include all non-human, non-domesticated and non-genetically engineered living organisms in their own varied species, populations and ecosystems. The term covers as well geological, hydrological and meteorological, planetary and galactic systems and their components.

plants, and animals, for the reason of his being rational. Burchett (2014) shares this view when he claims that for Aristotle humans are superior ontologically and axiologically to other life forms for their kind of being and reason. Since they don’t possess rationality then they should serve the ends and interests of man. Aristotle, in his book, *The Politics* (1999) teaches us that

plants exist for the sake of animals . . . all other animals exist for the sake of man, tame animals for the use he can make of them as well as for the food they provide; and as wild animals, most though not all of these can be used for food and are useful in other ways; clothing and tools can be made out of them. If then we are right in believing that nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man (Bk. 1 ch. 8, 1256b).

This viewpoint was subsequently picked up by St. Thomas Aquinas, the most prominent follower of Aristotle, who concurs with the idea and position of the beloved thinker that animals do exist for the sake of man and can make use of them for food. In his book *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas writes, “*We refute the error of those who claim that it is a sin for man to kill brute animals. For animals are ordered to man’s use in the natural course of things, according to divine providence. Consequently, man uses them without any injustice, either by killing them or employing them in any other way*” (Bk III, pt.II).

Aside from Aristotle, Gribben and Fagan (2016) also mentioned Immanuel Kant and Rene Descartes to espouse anthropocentric views. Des Jardins (1992) explains that Kant thought that only subjects and ends have rights and moral standing, while objects and means do not. Following Aristotle, Kant accordingly believes that only beings who are free and rational can be rightfully referred to as having moral value and thus are the only ones who can be considered as subjects. Ergo, animals,



and plants are considered as objects. In another work, Kant (2000) mentioned that since man is the only being here on earth who has reason, he is, therefore, the titular lord of nature and is the ultimate end of nature based on its teleology.

As for Descartes, the reasoning behind his mindset that human beings are above animals and plants can be elucidated in two ways. The first is according to Gribben and Fagan (2016), who contended that Descartes thought of human beings to be exceptional creatures because they are the only ones who have free will while animals rely on instincts. The second is according to Des Jardins (1992), who expounded extensively in this regard that Descartes believed in *res cogitans* (mind) and *res extensa* (bodies). The former includes all thinking, sensation, and consciousness, which are proper to man. The latter covers all things physical and spatial, purely mechanistic and devoid of consciousness. Aligning himself with Aristotle, Descartes thought that only those who have consciousness can be said to be moral beings. Ergo, anything that is not conscious can be treated as a physical thing, as an object, and so can be treated without any concern for its well-being. This is what Ken Wilber (2000), in his book entitled *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* means when he propounded the idea of a fractured worldview and avers that it is “*which separates mind and body, subject and object, culture and nature, thoughts and things, values and facts, spirit and nature, human and non-human; a worldview that is dualistic, mechanistic, atomistic, anthropocentric, and pathologically hierarchical*”.

From the foregoing exposition on why there is the primacy of human beings over plants and animals, we can deduce that it is his rationality that precisely bestows him that honor. This ability to reason enables man to think, be conscious, and have free will, and these same traits are not endowed to plants and animals. Following the

logic, they can be rightly used, then, without any remorse or thought of injustice for the welfare and sustenance of man.

When plants and animals are perceived to be objects and means, that is when the trouble starts. When these sentient beings are looked down on, as such, all the worse for non-sentient creatures like rivers, mountains, forests, air, and sea. *Laudato Si* unequivocally condemns the degradation brought on them all in the name of progress, change, and the so-called growth of humanity when it declares, “*The goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development. Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity.*” (LS ¶18)

The document is copious in its exhortation and pleas that man ought to change his viewpoint in order to avert the inevitable ecological time bomb. We are called upon to change our personal and social lifestyle, our throwaway technological culture, our *modus operandi* on production and consumption as well as the manner we manage our economy, from an anthropocentric to ecocentric way of doing things.

DEBUNKING ANTHROPOCENTRISM THROUGH ECOCENTRISM

The world that we are living in has been around for thousands, perhaps millions, of years. Man has always been living in a symbiotic relationship with nature. There was a copious supply of resources for man's needs, and certainly, there was balance in the ecosystem. Then came the Industrial Revolution, which changed the course of human history as well as his way of life. *Laudato Si* reminds us that “*we are the beneficiaries of two*



centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, aeroplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies, and nanotechnologies." (¶102)

This is the world that we are living in now, in the 21st century. *"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"* (LS ¶34). The said document wants us to shudder in anguish and feel the pain when it poetically asks, *"Who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?"* (LS ¶41).

For the past few years, there have been efforts to explore more about the planet Mars. While we marvel at the latest scientific advances that could possibly be habitable for humans, the question is, why spend enormous amounts of resources like time and money when we could focus on rehabilitating our very own planet? Why not concentrate our energies on saving Mother Earth while we still can? This is not to say, however, that there are no efforts exerted by some well-meaning individuals, cause-oriented groups, academic institutions, and inter and multi-government cooperation agencies. Even the Church is doing its own part in reversing this ecological crisis. There are Laudato Si Movements⁸ in some countries and an umbrella organization worldwide.

What, then, is this so-called ecocentrism? If anthropocentrism is human-centered, then ecocentrism is nature-centered. This may

⁸ Laudato Si Movement Pilipinas is a global, grass-roots movement of Catholics committed to living out the message of Laudato Si': On the Care of Our Common Home. Being part of his advocacy, the researcher is a member and regularly attends conferences and seminars.

sound too simplistic, but it has far-reaching implications, foremost of which is the belief that all organisms, whether sentient or non-sentient, have equal rights to exist and co-exist in this world. As such, they cannot be simply used as objects or means. The term "ecocentric" originated from the word "biocentric," which was coined by Lawrence Henderson in 1913 to remind everyone that the universe is the originator of life (Campbell, 1983).

Then came the "Deep Ecologists" in the 70s, where they borrowed the term and gave it a more encompassing signification, to mean that all life has an intrinsic value (Nash, 1989). This paradigm shift changed the complexion of how man conducts himself with other existing creatures. Little by little, we have made some headways. People these days have become more conscious of how they deal with and treat the environment. While there are still others who do not bother, there is a growing number of conscientious people, most especially those who have felt the adverse effects of this environmental crisis.

When the notion on anthropocentrism was expounded, we started with its theological basis by citing the Creation narrative in Gen. 1:28 which gives us the impression of man's dominion over all the earth. At this point we shall also start with the theological basis for ecocentrism.

Let us begin by recalling that there is another passage which tempers this aforecited directive to *"fill the earth and subdue it"*. In Gen. 2:15 it says, *"The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it"* (The New American Bible, 2002). In other versions, it says *"till the earth and keep it"*. To keep is to care.



Jurgen Moltmann, a German Protestant theologian (1926-2024), gives us a very interesting and novel way of reading Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 2:15. He traced back the origin of the concept of man's dominion to modern theology, which taught about man's lordship over the world. This was the mechanistic concept of the earth where everything had to be "subdued" and "subjected". (Moltmann, 2019). He also mentioned the likes of Pico della Mirandola and Francis Bacon, who propounded this kind of understanding and reached its climax in Rene Descartes' *res cogitans* (the human mind) and *res extensa* (nature). Here, nature is seen only by the mind as being extended objects and so reducible to mathematical calculations, and this consists of the very foundations of modern science by which liberal and consumeristic economy rests. In this regard, Moltmann (2019) gave a new twist to fend off this understanding by asserting:

According to the new ecological way of reading the same creation narratives in the Bible, the human being is the last being God creates and therefore the most dependent of all God's creations. For their life on earth, human beings are dependent on the existence of animals and plants, air and water, light, daytime and night-time, sun, moon, and stars, and without these things, they cannot live. Human beings exist only because all these other creatures exist. The other creatures can all exist without the human being, but human beings cannot exist without them. So, it is impossible to conceive of the human being as a divine potentate, or as a solitary gardener, over against nature. Whatever their "special position" and their special tasks may be, human beings are one created being in the great "community of life," and part of nature. Before the divine "breath" is breathed into the human being, as the second creation account tells, the human is "dust from the ground" (Gen. 2:7), and before human beings "till and keep" the earth, they know: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Moltmann, 2019)

In this passage, Moltmann thumbs down the prevailing understanding that man being created last means that he is the apex of God's

creation. He balked at that kind of viewpoint by counterposing that since man is the last being created by God, therefore, he is the most dependent of all. This can be seen by the fact that the other creatures by God can exist without man but man cannot exist without them. *Laudato Si* concurs with this viewpoint of Moltmann when it sets the record straight by saying that the idea of man's dominion over all the earth that allegedly allows him to exploit and manipulate the resources around him is not a correct interpretation of the Bible, it is a distorted one as understood by many (LS ¶67). In reference to the second passage, Gen. 2:15 on "tilling and keeping", *Laudato Si* unmistakably asserts:

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)

Another idea that can be culled from Moltmann's passage is the notion that human beings were created to become members of the community of life and part of nature. This particular insight is very evident in *Laudato Si* when it states that "all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another" (LS ¶42). In another paragraph, the same sentiment is put forward when it affirms that "everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to others" (LS ¶70).

Both *Laudato Si* and the ideas of Moltmann resonate with the positions of ecocentrism,



which is counter to anthropocentrism. For the longest time, human interests have taken priority over nature and transformed it without any restriction and without considering the adverse effects it may bring to the natural environment. Now man is reaping the fruits of his exploitation. John Broome (2015) insists that severe climate change may be catastrophic and may even cause the extinction of humans.

Attfield (1999) claims that aside from anthropocentrism, there are other alternative viewpoints like sentientism (accords moral recognition to all creatures with feelings and so capable of suffering and pain), biocentrism admits that all living creatures⁹ have moral standing), and ecocentrism (grants moral value to the ecosystem and biosphere). The third alternative position then considers all the members of the biotic community as parts of the whole system, and as such, there is mutuality and dependence among members of the said community (Donev, 2019).

While anthropocentrism may brazenly treat the environment as an object and means, ecocentrists believe that nature has a spiritual endowment, “*it has a soul or consciousness*” (Norton, 1997), and so it has an intrinsic value and worth (Thompson and Barton, 1994). This standpoint clearly reflects the position of *Laudato Si* when it avers that “*we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes*” (¶69). If we go over the Creation story, we can read that after God has created on a particular day say, the seas, mountains, animals that crawl or fly, He would say that “*it is good*”. This is an explicit affirmation of the inherent goodness and value of every

creature, sentient or not. Obviously, man has to end the utilitarian manner of harnessing the goods of the earth. This can be manifested by setting aside that consumeristic throwaway culture. There is a need to change our lifestyles in such a way that our material desires are kept to a minimum because, as such, they are artificial products of human society (Des Jardins, 1992).

The concept of being one with nature, living harmoniously with other members of the biotic community, and respecting, preserving, and conserving our earthly habitat has long been espoused and lived out in their actual lives by our Eastern counterparts. Gribben and Fagan (2016) mentioned the Chinese Daoists, who put a premium on the harmony and balance between humanity and nature, as well as the Buddhists, who uphold interconnectedness between all living and non-living creatures. These insights were reinforced by Nikolova (2019) when she forwards the idea that “*According to Hinduism, everything is just a modification and manifestation of that Unnameable One*”. Being the case, reverence for life is their unyielding mantra. This attitude is best reflected in Mahatma Gandhi’s principle of *ahimsa* or the principle of non-violence. “*This principle sees the one divine nature within every being and therefore approaches everything with equal care and respect*” (Nikolova, 2019).

Following the standpoint of Ecocentrism, a movement called Deep Ecology came up sometime in 1973 when Arne Naess, a Norwegian analytic philosopher, contrasted shallow ecology with deep ecology, enthuses Des Jardins (1992). He continues that the former focuses on the immediate effects of the environmental crisis while the latter looks for more holistic and enduring solutions.

Bombik (2020) relates that the Deep Ecology movement takes on other names

⁹ *Laudato Si* (¶76) explains that in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature”. It has to do with God’s loving plan, in which every creature has its own value. Nature is usually seen as a system that can be studied, understood, and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all and as a reality illuminated by the love, which calls us together into universal communion.





or terminologies like “eco-philosophy” (*Oikophilosophie*), “fundamental ecology” (*Fundamental-oekologie*), or “new philosophy of nature” (*Neue Naturphilosophie*), “radical ecology” (*Radikaloekologie*) and “revolutionary ecology” (*Revolutionaere Oekologie*.)” The over-arching principle and standpoint of this movement is that all living beings in their natural communities and species have a moral value that has to be respected and given due consideration as they have a role to play in the entire ecosystem and that they are part and parcel of the whole symbiotic community.

George Sessions (1995), in his book *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, enumerates eight platforms:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. The richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values, and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must, therefore, be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard

of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the following points have an obligation, directly or indirectly, to try to implement the necessary changes.

The researcher will not belabor to explain each one of the eight platforms except to point out some key ideas that debunk the notion and practice of anthropocentrism, which is considered as an ecological fallacy. Furthermore, the researcher wishes to express his belief that the policies and principles by which Ecocentrism, in general, and Deep Ecology, in particular, share very strong and unmistakable parallelisms with the formulations, provisions, and teachings of *Laudato Si*. This document was written in 2015, while the Deep Ecology movement started around the 1970s.

The first platform is a catch-all statement that points out the notion of inviolability of both human and non-human life by reminding everyone of their intrinsic and inherent value, regardless of whether they are useful or not useful to man. The third platform is crucial as well because it sets the limit on how far man may employ the richness and diversity of life, which is to satisfy his vital needs. The key term here is ‘vital’ because it sets the tone on the extent of use and discourages some capitalistic machinations of unscrupulous entities in the use of the earth’s natural resources. The fifth platform is also reflective of the lamentation we read in *Laudato Si* on the deteriorating condition of Mother Earth due to man’s throwaway culture. The document concurs with the foregoing insights when it discloses that:

Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for “instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature”. (¶117)





We ought to bear in mind the Creation story insight of Jurgen Moltmann that the non-human life around us, plants, animals, mountains, and seas, can continue to live without us, but we cannot continue to live without them. When man shamelessly exploits natural resources, it is reflective of the kind of mentality that he has and which ultimately points back to his (im)moral framework. *Laudato Si* (¶46) succinctly tells us that the growth of the past two centuries is not altogether integral and beneficial but shows some cracks of a social decline and an inaudible rupture of social bond and cohesion. When this happens, we can be sure of an existing moral deterioration. Des Jardins (1992) shares this observation when he opines that our present environmental crisis is caused by our philosophical framework. Indeed, the psychomotor aspect follows the lead of the cognitive framework.

How much longer can Mother Earth endure? How do we even change our long-held but capricious viewpoints of dominion? Where do we start? Robin Attfield (1999), quoting another author, Rene Dubos, suggests that we “*think globally, but act locally*”. While there are environmental problems on a global scale that need whole-scale solutions, the researcher believes that everything boils down to a paradigm shift from dominion to care and from personal to communal. We are a community, and God has given us a common home.

The concept of dominion, which is the mindset of anthropocentrism, has been exposed in the preceding pages to be fallacious. It is high time that we swing to the other side of the pendulum and advocate the culture of care. It is not a coincidence that the subtitle of *Laudato Si* bears the word “care”. Rev. Fr. Danny Pilario, CM¹⁰, in

¹⁰ Fr. Danny Pilario, CM, is the current president of Adamson University, Manila, Philippines. He is a respected Filipino theologian and a CBCP consultant. As a pioneering mind on eco-theology, he has published articles about (post)apocalyptic theology. Cf. (Post) Apocalyptic Reflections from ‘Ground Zero’. Concilium, 2014/3 and

his talk before the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), pointed out that the word “care” and the “culture of care” appear around thirty-three times while the word “stewardship”, which subtly reflects the anthropocentric notion of dominion is only used two times. (Pilario, 2024). This signals the change of direction from the old Judaeo-Christian standpoint to the 21st-century viewpoint. Moreover, Fr. Pilario (2024) cited a beautiful insight from Cardinal Turkson, which says, “*If one cares, however, one is connected. To care is to allow oneself to be affected by another, so much so that one’s path and priorities change... With caring, the hard line between the self and other softens, blurs, even disappears.*”

The idea that “care” softens and blurs the hard line between self and other is propitious in terms of changing mindsets and leads us to the second item we need to overhaul – the personal into the communal. We care because we belong to a community. We care for Mother Earth because there are other creatures who live in it and need to perpetuate their species. We care for our planet for the sake of our children and our children’s children.

The concept of community has been tackled and elaborated on by environmental philosophers like Aldo Leopold, Arne Naess, J. Baird Callicott, and others. Their positions are geared towards quashing the dominion perspective of anthropocentrism, which harbors personalist and capitalistic tendencies. Since this paper is more of an exposition of Ecocentrism as an antidote to anthropocentrism as seen in the backdrop of *Laudato Si*, it is not, therefore, the intention of the researcher to discuss comprehensively the positions of the aforementioned thinkers. At best, we can only have a cursory treatment of their

Ecology and the Apocalypse. William T. Cavanaugh, ed. (2018) in *Fragile World: Ecology and the Church*. (Oregon: Cascade Books).





major ideas to lend credence the viability of the ecocentric standpoint.

In 1949 the ecologist Aldo Leopold wrote a book entitled *A Sand County Almanac* which since then has become one of the pillars of environmental philosophy. There he deplored the environmental crisis that the world is currently facing such as species extinction, climate change, which has resulted in global warming, perennial air and water pollution, and the destruction of forest lands (Kortenkamp and Moore, 2001). Seeing the pathetic condition of the environment, which has gone south, he proposes a new ethic that integrates and relates human beings with the animals, the land, and the plants that flourish on it. He believes that when there is an interdependent and complementary relationship between human and non-human entities in the biotic community, there will be integrity, stability, and beauty (Gribben and Fagan, 2016).

For his part, Arne Naess batted for biospherical egalitarianism. He was inspired by his idol Mahatma Gandhi, who, according to his European companions who happened to live with him in his *ashram*, was surprised to see snakes, scorpions, and spiders inside his bedroom, for he believed in co-existence. More curiously, Gandhi even prohibited people from stocking anti-poisonous medicines if they happened to be bitten by them. They attested, though, that there were no accidents (Naess, 1995). What do these seemingly weird practices redound to? It only goes to show that all human and non-human life have equal rights to live and survive in a biotic community. Again, this augurs well with the second platform of ecocentrism, which calls for respect for the richness and diversity of life.

Accordingly, Deep Ecology, in their goal to promote oneness, developed three teachings: the view that (a) everything has intrinsic value regardless of whether they are useful to man or not; (b) biocentric egalitarianism which posits that all entities have equal value; and (c) self-realization which points to the fulfillment of the purpose of a certain entity (Nikolova, 2019).

Ecocentrism, therefore, redounds to biocentric or biospherical egalitarianism where every creature has moral value and thus ought not to be treated as an object and means to an end. No creature, no matter how lowly or inconsequential they may be, can simply be quashed for no acceptable reason. *Laudato Si* is very clear when it affirms that “every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection”. (¶77) It is very touching to read that “even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love”. This goes to show that each and every creature is valuable in God’s eyes. We can read in the document why this is so. “... each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God” (¶84) It goes without saying, therefore, that our “dominion over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship”. (¶116).

CONCLUSION: CULTIVATING AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

After refuting anthropocentrism as the supposedly rightful manner of dealing with the environment and having put forward the concept of ecocentrism, we are now in a position to make full circle our position on the care of our common home.





Environmental degradation is undeniable. Ecological crisis is very much felt. What kind of common home are we going to bequeath to the next generation? We, who have experienced the beauty and grandeur of creation, shall we pass on a world filled with filth, foul, and defiled? Is this how God wanted the earth He entrusted to us to become – a ticking time bomb? Is this how we “keep” the earth? *Laudato Si* rhetorically asks, “*What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?*” (¶160).

The researcher, in all respects, agrees with the position of the said document that it takes more than just technical and technological solutions to the ills that plague our earth. Since we are treating our environment from a particular type of mental framework, hence, change should occur internally, in the ontological realm – a paradigm shift from dominion and stewardship¹¹ to care and universal communion. The document is very clear on this, “*This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all*” (¶82).

Going back to Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” relation where we relate to nature, our fellowmen, and intelligible forms, there are only two options, either we relate to them as a “Thou” or as an “It”. The “I-Thou” relation is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, respect, and the ever-present thought of the welfare of the “Other”. The document shares the view of Buber:

Our openness to others, each of whom is a “thou” capable of knowing, loving, and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human

persons. A correct relationship with the created world demands that we not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the “Thou” of God. Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God (¶119).

In contrast, the “I-It” relation denotes use, abuse, exploitation, and objectification. When we relate to our fellowmen who are human beings, with personhood and individuality, who are sentient and thus can feel pain, in an “I-It” relation how much worse do we relate to non-living creatures that are not conscious like the land, air, rivers, and mountains? Certainly, it has a snowball effect. With the current state of the planet, it is obvious how we have treated it. Wilber (2000) enunciates it well when he says that this fractured worldview “*erroneously separates humans from, and often unnecessarily elevates humans above the rest of the fabric of reality, a broken worldview that alienates men and women from the intricate web of patterns and relationships that constitute the very nature of life and Earth and cosmos*”.

There is a direct relationship between the “I-It” mentality, which is crooked and exploitative, with man’s domineering viewpoint. Man will only dare to exploit and corrupt nature when he feels superior over other lowly creatures. This feeling of superiority emboldens him to objectify them. Conversely, one cannot manipulate someone whom he feels is superior and above him. In this regard, *Laudato Si* succinctly articulates:

It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people...

... Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for

¹¹ Fr. Pilario (2019), quoting other authors, said that the stewardship model is criticized as too managerial, hierarchical, androcentric with God acting like a patriarch and an absentee landlord and humans are “serfs”. This model, accordingly, subtly adheres to anthropocentrism because stewards can decide to dispose of other things.





each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, and mother earth. (¶92)

We are part of one ecosystem, one biosphere, one common home. There is no other. The planet Mars could be habitable but it would take hundreds of years to make it a habitat. Mother Earth is all we have and she cries in pain and anguish due to the wretchedness of man's heart. The document hits its bullseye when it declares that we indignify ourselves when we are vicious and spiteful towards any creature. The reason is unmistakable – everything is related. St. Francis of Assisi calls the sun and river his brothers, the moon his sister, and the earth his mother. We belong to one web of life and thus share in one bed of life. We, as creatures, ride in one boat, the proverbial Noah's Ark, where everyone and everything share in one symbiotic relationship, all singing our hymns of praise and glory to our Creator.

There is much to do and much that we can still do to avert an environmental cataclysm. While our problems are global, we can do so much in our backyard. In fact, all that is required of us is a paradigmatic ontological shift from being domineering masters to being caretakers of the earth. The document puts it appropriately:

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).

Indeed, what is needed is a mental, psychological, and even emotional overhaul that would lead to a more humane and compassionate orientation toward all creatures. For us in the academe, it will take an inclusive top-to-bottom approach

to re-educate and re-orient all stakeholders on how to care for our common home. More than just slogans and activities on how to take care of Mother Earth, we need an honest-to-goodness reconstituting and reforming of our outmoded mental frameworks through environmental education. Wilber (2000) claims that the only way we can heal the planet, and heal ourselves, is by replacing this fractured worldview with a worldview that is more holistic, more relational more integrative, more Earth-honoring, and less arrogantly human-centered. Andrew Fiala (2015) echoes this conviction when he declares that solutions to our ecological crisis involve a spiritual renewal that covers ethical, economic, social, and political justice.

Undeniably, it is a cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge. Obviously, this is a gargantuan task and a long-term solution but there is no other way. *Laudato Si* is very explicit on this:

Environmental education has broadened its goals. Whereas in the beginning it was 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 (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market). It also seeks to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God. Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care. (¶210)

For the longest time, the modern mind, our minds, have unwaveringly embraced the dominion mentality. It has become so deep-seated that it has become man's second nature to treat nature as second. The mindset of modern man is essentially egoistic and soulless when





it comes to the “goods” of the earth. The only way to transform this egoistic attitude to being ecocentric is to show that these so-called “goods” have a transcendent character. Only then can man grow in harmony and compassionate care for our common home. The document shares the view that *“our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, and our relationship with nature”* (¶215).

There is much that can be done especially in an educational setting. What we aim to cultivate in environmental education is ecological consciousness. Why not integrate Environmental Ethics into the curricular program for all students? After all conservation and preservation of the Earth is a moral issue (Norton, 1997).

Since the clientele is composed of students whose future largely rests on the sustainability of their common home, then it would be easy to convince them to come up with some small steps in their daily lives on how to care for it. In fact, it behooves them to act since it is their very own future and the future home of their children, which is mostly at stake. As the American Indian proverb states, *“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”*.

It is surmised that in terms of local solutions, they are the group that can be pooled easily for seminars, conferences, and other fora in terms of cultivating an ecological consciousness. Aside from that is the zeal and idealism of the youth, which should spur them vigorously to make impactful initiatives on the environmental problems in their immediate surroundings. The document is unwavering in its assertion that:

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting, which directly and significantly affect the world around us, 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... (¶211)

The cliché goes that every long journey starts with a single step. The deterioration of the environment did not happen overnight; hence it will not be reversed overnight also. For the longest time, we embraced that dominion and steward perspective. All we need is a collective effort to take baby steps and small initiatives through the environmental education of our youth.

It all starts in the mind. When we are convinced that man doesn't have the right to dominate lesser creatures, when we buy into the idea that man is simply one among the rest in nature, he learns to be humble and live with respect and harmony with his fellow creatures. Martin Buber (1970) reminds us that *“If I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things”*. When we look at other things in this world, plants, animals, rocks, rivers, mountains, and many other myriad objects as ‘Thou’, they are not things among things. They are fellow creatures of God, like us, with moral value and intrinsic worth, thus to be treated with dignity, compassion, and benevolence.

All ‘things’ give glory to God, and in all things, God may be glorified.





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