

Exploration of Pope Francis' Laudato Si: Environment Concerns and Evangelical Literature

Joel S John, MA English,
Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), NAAC A++,
Bangalore North University
&
Dr. Irona Bhaduri,
Assistant Professor,
Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), NAAC A++,
Bangalore North University

Abstract

As our world faces pressing environmental concerns, it is enlightening to examine the perspectives of religious leaders who have delved into the intricate relationship between humans and nature. Once pristine and teeming with natural air and water, the environment has now reached a critical point of pollution, leading to the rapid deterioration of our ecosystem. If we do not act swiftly to reduce pollution, the entire ecosystem is at risk of disappearing, and all living beings on our planet will be impacted. It is imperative that we take significant steps to preserve our ecosystem, such as reducing emissions and raising awareness among citizens through spiritual and evangelical literature. This paper delves into Pope Francis' Laudato Si, which advocates for environmental conservation through Christian values and addresses diverse aspects of environmental degradation.

Keywords: Environmental degradation, environmental communication, and conservation, Christian values, intersection of literature and society

Introduction

“A vision of nature as a self-articulating-subject refutes nature/culture dualism inherent in our thinking towards a consciousness of humans valuing both nature and culture in their diversity”- (Dr. SerpiOppermann, 1991)

Ecocriticism studies the interaction of environment and literature, focusing on the depictions of life and the connection between the individual and their environment. Originating from ecology,

this critical lens looks at the ever-growing response to environmental concerns of degradation. Ecocriticism has been explored internationally as an interdisciplinary review of literature, culture, environment, and overall humanity's approach to nature. In this paper, we will attempt an innovative approach to look at evangelical text from the point of view of eco-criticism.

In the essay "The Value of Ecocriticism," Timothy Clark (2011) explores the concept of postcolonial ecocriticism, that is extended globally, especially those nations which are formerly colonized. Clark argues that ecocriticism's value lies in its diversity and flexibility to integrate all aspects including cultures. He also discusses the challenges that ecocriticism faces, such as the Anthropocene, which thrusts contemporary ecocriticism and artistic forms toward reevaluation of multiplicity and intricacy. Clark considers that the poetic practice, rather than the genre of the novel, is qualified to embody incoherence and unconformities generated by the Anthropocene. The Western novel in particular gives principal prominence to individual experience, which is more regional. However, current environmental issues tend to be more universal.

Clark's scalar literacy thesis holds that understanding size and contingency is essential to modern global ecocriticism. According to Clark, eco-critics ought to see literary texts as "freeze-framed" representations of a longer temporal scale, which would capture specific moments within a larger continuum of geological and biological mechanisms. This viewpoint is a sharp call to action for ecocritics to adopt an Anthropocene criticism based on the scalar literacy that modern globalization requires. The project aims to rethink ecocriticism in order to give it a more comprehensive approach that incorporates the quickly evolving ideas of the local and the global. This extends to environmental advocacy and includes representation in literature and the arts. By doing this, the initiative hopes to modify ecocriticism in order to more effectively handle the intricate, varied problems of the Anthropocene age, promoting a more sustainable and just future by encouraging a greater knowledge of how humans affect the environment.

Coming back to the loci of discussion, In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis speaks about today's pressing ecological problems, such as pollution, climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, population decline, and global inequality. He wanted to emphasize that everyone benefits from a healthy climate. Additionally, he points out that the poor are more affected by its negative effects. Furthermore, despite the lack of international solutions to the problem of climate change, is also criticized by Pope Francis. He believes that everything was created by God with inherent goodness and that humans are special beings called to care for the natural world. This paper also highlights how sin, characterized by a strained relationship with God, has created this drift between humans and nature and has gone through enormous environmental devastation.

Additionally, according to Pope Francis, anthropocentrism is criticized by Pope Francis for devaluing creation and encouraging practical relativism. In his chapter on internal ecology, Pope Francis makes the persuasive claim that all of creation is highly interrelated, highlighting the essential connection between protecting the environment and advocating for the underprivileged. He is adamant that one must view justice, solidarity, and a dedication to the common good through the prism of "intergenerationalism." This viewpoint demands that we have a great deal of duty, not just to our peers but also to the next generation. Pope Francis is a fervent supporter of change on both the individual and community levels, calling for an end to widespread materialism and societal selfishness. This call to action highlights the necessity of a comprehensive transformation that includes sustainable living, a strong feeling of empathy, and a sense of duty to all living things on Earth. He urges people towards lifestyles animated by sound ecological virtues. He points out consumer movements like boycotts and calls for ecological education to be implemented everywhere in society, including schools, families, media, catechesis, political institutions, Christian communities, and the world at large. Pope Francis also reminds Christians that maintaining a proper relationship with God and the environment requires observance of the Sabbath and the Sacraments. He emphasizes how the Sacraments, as external manifestations of internal grace, are essential for fostering spiritual development and reaffirming our oneness with all of creation. A striking reminder of the divine order and the necessity of taking a break from the fast-paced modern world to think, revitalize, and enjoy the world around us is provided by the Sabbath, a day set aside for rest and worship. Christians are called to a stronger feeling of stewardship and duty towards the Earth by observing these sacred activities, realizing that taking care of creation is an essential part of their faith and spiritual well-being. Thus, the teachings of Pope Francis push Christians to merge their religion with a commitment to sustainable living and the preservation of our world for future generations, encouraging a harmonious balance between environmental consciousness and spiritual devotion.

The environment, encompassing things like food, water, air, and light, is a complicated combination of biological, chemical, social, and natural aspects that determines our immediate surroundings. Writing is essential for portraying our surroundings and reflecting our culture. The atmosphere in the past was defined by the availability of pure, natural air and water. However, the onset of industrialization and the subsequent increase in pollution have caused the health of ecosystems to significantly degrade. The enormous amounts of pollution we are currently experiencing are hastening the deterioration of our natural systems. The existence of animals, plants, trees, and the larger habitat is at risk if the current pace of pollution is allowed to continue

unchecked, posing a threat to the entire ecosystem. Strict policies that reduce emissions and increase public knowledge of environmental issues are necessary to prevent this ecological disaster. In this quest, literature may be a potent instrument, spreading important information via a variety of media, including billboards, flyers, magazine brochures, newsletters, and articles. By reaching large audiences, these communication platforms help raise public awareness of and participation in environmental concerns. Moreover, encouraging environmental communication requires the combined efforts of academic institutions and a variety of social sectors, such as the public, elected officials, scientists, and religious organizations. These kinds of cooperative endeavors have the power to inspire action and make it easier to preserve our planet so that it is viable for coming generations. Through the utilization of literary influence and the promotion of multidisciplinary collaboration, society may unite in defense and maintenance of our environment against present and emerging hazards.

This study looks at the role of environmental communication in addressing the ecological crisis, with a specific focus on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. The study seeks to answer questions about the key points in *Laudato Si* that prompt a rethinking of environmental communication, and how environmental communication can be redefined based on the encyclical's theological, spiritual, and moral principles. The model of environmental communication can be inferred from *Laudato Si* which is responsive to the need for integral and sustainable ecological development. The article emphasizes the importance of continuity and inclusivity, positive appreciation of the sacredness and beauty of creation, interdisciplinary dialogue, responsible stewardship, respect for creation, and a focus on the common good in environmental communication. The encyclical stresses the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, and the urgent need for a cultural revolution to address the environmental crisis.

The 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis bemoans global warming and environmental devastation, condemns consumerism and careless development, and urges international action. It analyzes the causes of ecological challenges and emphasizes the aspects of environmental degradation related to society, culture, ethics, and religion. The encyclical has received significant attention and has sparked discussions about ecological issues and humanity's responsibilities. Despite numerous efforts, environmental problems persist and require interdisciplinary and dialogic solutions. In this light, the paper explores how environmental communication can contribute to sustainable solutions.

Laudato Si and Environmental Communication

But human beings are not completely autonomous. Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence. In this sense, we stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint. (Pope Francis, 105)

Environmental communication encompasses different forms of communication about environmental issues and our relationship with nature. It is a professional field that draws theories and methods from various disciplines including communication, psychology, sociology, and political science. The topics covered range from scientific and economic to philosophical and moral dimensions of the ecological crisis. Environmental communication is seen as both a pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for understanding the environment and its impact on our health and well-being. This research takes a theological approach to environmental communication, exploring the biblical, systematic, moral, and spiritual aspects in the context of Christian discipleship. The salient points in *Laudato Si* compel a rethinking of environmental communication, such as the interconnectedness of human life with God, our fellow human beings, and the earth. It explores the theological and moral framework provided by the encyclical for redefining environmental communication. The most interesting proposed model of environmental communication is based on the concept of ‘integral ecology,’ which emphasizes the need for sustainable and holistic development. Christian thinkers like Thomas Berry and Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, etc. also reiterated the significance of environmental communication. Berry in his book, *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (2009) pinpointedly talks about humanity’s relationship with the planet realigning with the core concept of spirituality. Moreover, the Christian faith explores the role of eco-theology in interpreting the relationship between humans, nature, and God, and calls for a realization of interconnectedness and interdependence in our daily lives. This necessitates the need to understand and fulfill our moral responsibility to safeguard the environment.

Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* and its implications for environmental communication also include the critique of the ‘technocratic’ mindset and an unthinking reliance on market forces. The encyclical also emphasizes the need for a systematic approach to addressing the ecological crisis, linking all of humanity to the natural world and calling for a cultural revolution. Pope Francis criticizes the wealthy for ignoring climate change and its impact on the poor. The significance of this lies in the essence of continuity and inclusivity, positive appreciation for the

sacredness of creation, interdisciplinary dialogue, the ‘concept of the common good’, responsible stewardship, and respect for creation. The paper argues that environmental communication needs to adopt a spiritual perspective and prioritize the needs of the poor. *Laudato Si* provides a systematic overview of the crisis from a spiritual viewpoint, emphasizing the interconnectedness between people and the environment. The encyclical highlights the disproportionate effects of climate change on the poor and developing countries. Effective environmental communication should aim to promote the common good, fostering solidarity with fellow human beings and all of creation. It should encourage dialogue, respect diversity, and prioritize unity and care for both humanity and the environment. Solidarity, subsidiarity, the common good, the global destination of goods, and a preference for the earth and the poor must all be the cornerstones of environmental communication.

Value System and Environmental Cause

This encyclical is unique as it addresses human civilization, not just Christians or those of goodwill. It is considered the most innovative proposal on climate change and sustainable development in recent years. The encyclical has gained support across the globe and has been welcomed by policy-makers and civil society. As the head of faith with more than a billion adherents, Pope Francis has the ability to have a significant worldwide influence with his message. His lessons are applicable to a wide range of people from different communities and civilizations all over the world. The Pope's focus on the necessity of social justice, the interdependence of all things, and the value of environmental stewardship is highly significant. Pope Francis has the power to bring about revolutionary change by supporting a comprehensive strategy for meeting the needs of the underprivileged and protecting the environment. Millions of people might be mobilized by his demand for a personal and cultural shift away from materialism and toward sustainable living, which would have an impact on broader societal policy as well as individual conduct. The encyclical presents a new narrative, recognizing the challenges of climate change and resource depletion but emphasizing the potential for humanity to use its capabilities in the interest of world healing and the larger good. It reverses existing narratives that might lead to surrender or fear, instead generating enthusiasm and encouragement. The encyclical emphasizes the need for rapid decarbonization and the preservation of the planet's natural capital. Pope Francis sees the ecological challenge as a social challenge that requires a deep change in our relationships and awareness. In the preamble of the encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis establishes the foundation for his thoughts and ideas. He draws inspiration from Saint Francis' perspective on beauty and harmony with all creatures, emphasizing the need for a

spiritual transformation of humanity to address environmental issues. The Pope stresses the importance of listening to and learning from science and engaging in dialogue with individuals. He encourages collective responsibility by acknowledging that everyone has played a role in the problem and must be part of the solution. Pope Francis highlights the immense and urgent challenge humanity faces and calls for an acknowledgment of the appeal and beauty of this challenge. He references the words of Nikolai Berdyaev to emphasize that humanity's purpose is to cooperate with God in the ongoing creation of the world and to demonstrate how it can responsibly use its capabilities to shape the world. This preamble sets the stage for the subsequent discourse. Rahman, Abbas and Pattu (2023) reiterate that "Ecological studies that examine the relationship between humans and nature are incomplete without considering the connection to God as the creator of creatures (humans and nature)." (p.11)

The encyclical by Pope Francis addresses the problem of the changes happening to our planet and emphasizes the need to question the current approach of unwarranted faith in human growth and capabilities. It highlights the issue of the 'throwaway culture,' which refers to the unsustainable exploitation of both material goods and human beings. The encyclical acknowledges the scientific consensus on climate change and its impact on developing countries and vulnerable populations. Notably, the encyclical reverses the narrative surrounding climate change and resource depletion by endorsing the scientific consensus and emphasizing the social dimensions of the ecological crisis. It also explores the relationship between science and religion and proposes an ecological spirituality based on love and a culture of care. The encyclical calls for a profound interior conversion and a shift towards a civilization of love that prioritizes the common good and the well-being of all, especially the most vulnerable. The encyclical emphasizes the need for a new ethics that recognizes the planet as a common good and acknowledges humanity's responsibility for its impact on the Earth. It calls for an assumption of responsibility and the use of scientific and technological capabilities to heal the planet. The paper highlights the similarity between Pope Francis' ethical proposal and Jonas' responsibility ethics, both emphasizing humanity's capability and responsibility for the greater good. The encyclical's influence on policy-making moves, along with the importance of ideas in societal transformation, etc. are some of the essential highlights of the work. The paper recognizes the encyclical's affirmation of scientific consensus and its call for a bold cultural revolution that involves all creative capacities, including religions and spirituality. While critiquing financial markets for their unethical practices, the encyclical also acknowledges their potential to bring about change and calls for an alliance with asset managers engaged in sustainable actions.

Conclusion

The encyclical letter *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis is a complex document that addresses the ecological crisis as a symptom of the throwaway culture and technocratic paradigm. The encyclical emphasizes the need to address the deep-rooted values that permeate modern societies. It implies that acknowledging the existence of a Creator can assist Christians in responding to and maintaining our shared planet, but Pope Francis's model of love and fraternity can also be used in a secular setting. This paradigm involves addressing issues of social justice and equity alongside environmental care. The encyclical also acknowledges that many economists, even those from liberal schools of thought, recognize the need to reverse the dramatic increase in inequalities. This is essential for environmental sustainability, as the world has seen multiple failures that require corrective actions through stringent laws, policy-making and spiritual-environmental awakening.

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