

Spiritual Values, Evangelical Literature, and Environmentalism: A Reading of Pope Francis' Laudato Si

Joel S John *
MA English,
Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous),
Bangalore North University
Bengaluru
&
Irona Bhaduri,
Assistant Professor,
Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous),
Bangalore North University
Bengaluru

ABSTRACT

The connection between humans and the ecology is integrally interconnected and interdependent. The invitation to change our mindset and actions towards the environment, known as ecological conversion, should be emphasized, given the environmental conditions in the present times. Such ideas are reinforced with evangelical texts that can transform humankind for a better tomorrow. This paper explores various aspects of an encyclical named Laudato Si written by Pope Francis. Further, this paper delves into the intricate relationship between spiritual tapestry and environmental concerns by analysing the evangelical text. Laudato Si provides deep insights into humans' challenges as they negotiate their societal and spiritual roles. Pope Francis gives a comprehensive representation of the problems encountered by the world in contemporary times and also puts forward modernism, and also puts forward Christian values and spiritualism as a solution. This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the changing dynamics of the world, the planet, and the presence of Godliness to cater to environmental challenges.

Keywords: *Environmental concerns, Christian values, spiritual awakening, belief system*

Introduction

*We must realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach;
it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, to hear both the
cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (Pope Francis 35).*

* Corresponding Author: Joel S John

Email: keezhuttujoel@gmail.com

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The most comprehensive Christian treatise on environmentalism, morality, and ethics to date is Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. It is considered a great manifesto to the Christian belief system; however, the document is for individuals regardless of their religious affiliation. However, the pivotal ideas are based on religious beliefs that every religion strives to be associated with. These beliefs are subsequently translated into a universal philosophical language. The idea propounded by him is comprehensible for both Christian and non-Christian readers from all over the world to imbibe, internalize, and act on. *Laudato Si* explores a wide range of subjects and encompasses various aspects within its text. Many facets of moral reasoning are applied, such as the evaluation of natural law, human rights, justice, and individual traits as well as possible results or repercussions. Like other Catholic teachings and belief systems, the statement emphasizes humanitarian causes and the collective good as the central concepts of ethical reasoning. Philippe Crabbé observes that, Drawn from the Franciscan intellectual tradition that integrates effective inquiry and social engagement, knowledge alone is not adequate to guide humans to a balanced relationship with creation, nor to the sense of religious purpose God intends for all created reality. (Intechopen.com)

However, the most notable ethical aspect highlighted in *Laudato Si* is the importance given to the inherent worth of beings and the environment that belongs to the human species. One notable aspect of the document's ethical content is the extent to which it enhances or emphasizes certain ideas. The idea of the common good emphasizes the interconnection between all living beings; accentuating that forgetting or ignoring this interconnectedness often leads to moral failure in human interaction with the environment. The encyclical specifically critiques a particular type of moral reasoning, which is an emotionless utilitarianism linked to an economic and technological mindset that is separate from wider moral considerations.

Further, numerous aspects discussed in this encyclical can be seen as overarching principles as well. These themes include personal responsibility, social justice, privacy and confidentiality, professional boundaries, and cultural sensitivity. Each theme is often reflected in considering the ethical challenges that can arise in their professional practice. Another significant subject in the encyclical is the idea of the 'integral ecology.' Pope Francis contends that social and economic inequality are closely linked to environmental degradation. Leonardo Boff, a major theologian and ecologist in his pathbreaking article "The Magna Carta of Integral Ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor" elucidates that "Pope Francis does not write as a Master or Doctor of faith, but as a zealous pastor who cares for the common home of all beings, not just humans,

that inhabit it” (earthcharter.org). He advocates addressing issues such as the interconnectedness of natural systems, and economic and social aspects holistically. The encyclical, additionally, takes a resolution to combat the issue of environmental change, featuring the earnest need for action to contest this worldwide crisis. Pope Francis issues a dire warning regarding environmental change, especially for the world’s most vulnerable communities. He calls on individuals, nations, and industries to take responsibility for their role unfortunate contribution to the overall degradation of the environment. One of the pivotal transformative messages of *Laudato Si* is the importance of sustainability. Pope Francis contends that pecuniary development shouldn’t emanate at the expense of environmental degradation. He further calls for a development strategy that prioritizes the planet.

The Human-Ecology Interconnection

The encyclical discusses the conundrum of consumerism, and the ‘throwaway culture’ (as mentioned by Pope Francis) suffuses contemporary society. Pope Francis condemns the exorbitant use of varied resources and the inefficiency that describes numerous parts of contemporary life. He necessitates an approach of more mindful consumption that emphasizes environmental conservation and sustainability. Another essential perspective communicated in *Laudato Si* is the role of innovation and technology. The text delves deep into how this aspect molds our relationship with the environment. Even though Pope Francis is aware of the potential advantages of technological progressions, he likewise cautions against the risks of over-dependence on advancement and the adverse consequences it might have on the climate. The issue of environmental justice is also addressed in the encyclical, and the fact that the weak inhabitants are in many cases the most impacted by ecological debasement. Pope Francis calls for fortitude with the people who are enduring because of environmental change and destruction of the environment and emphasizes the need for a society that is more just and equitable. In addition, the spiritual aspect of our relationship with the is discussed in *Laudato Si*. According to Pope Francis, protecting the natural world is not only a moral and a spiritual practice; in addition is an ethical obligation that can strengthen our connection to God and all living creatures. By and large, *Laudato Si* is a strong source of inspiration to address the natural emergency confronting our planet. The encyclical tends to different subjects and issues, from the interconnectedness of all living creatures to the requirement for sustainable development and environmental egalitarianism. Pope Francis moves us to reassess our relationship with the

regular world and acquire a sense of responsibility for the prosperity of the planet and every one of its occupants. Pope Francis points out:

There is a growing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet... Our goal 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 suffering, and thus to discover what each of us can do about it (16).

Humans are responsible for the increase in temperature by emitting greenhouse gases through our activities of Carbon dioxide, in its gaseous form. However, science is unable to determine whether this warming is positive or negative. To accomplish this task, one must prioritize and allocate efforts accordingly. understand that it is crucial to assess the ethical implications of the scientific findings. Religion can assist in terms of moral guidance and shaping one's perspective on the world. Religion also serves as a source of inspiration to act upon scientific information, emphasizing the importance of comprehending that we possess the power to make a difference based on this knowledge. Specific roles are given to us by God to cultivate and maintain the Earth. This is a powerful drive to protect and responsibly utilize the Earth's resources. The text addresses the intricate ecological crisis with its numerous causes. It recognizes that the answers will not only come from one particular perspective and therefore change the nature of existence and sustain life, but we must also recognize the importance of nurturing a balanced and interconnected ecosystem. In the process of rectifying the harm that has been inflicted, it may be expedient to disregard or omit every scientific discipline, as well as all forms of knowledge, including religion and its associated nomenclature.

Indian Context - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

The message of *Laudato Si* is particularly meaningful in India, a nation with a rich spiritual and cultural legacy that emphasizes the interdependence of all living things. The concept of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*,' adheres to the idea that 'the world is one family' highlighting a global perspective. This perspective is echoed through ancient Indian religious belief systems like Hinduism, Buddhism, and also Jainism. This stresses the significance of living as one with nature and respecting all forms of life. To talk about the present context, India faces extensive environmental challenges, all of which pose a threat to the country's natural ecosystems and its population's well-being. A path to overcoming these hurdles is provided by the principles outlined in the text *Laudato Si*. For example, Pope Francis gives a call to adopt sustainable lifestyles and promote ecological education. Brazal explains, "The document also underlines

how it is in the family that we learn how to care for others, the ecosystem, and all creatures (no. 213), but especially for the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters (no. 64) in creation. (223-224)

By embracing the values of interconnectedness and stewardship articulated in the encyclical, India can work towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all its citizens. *Laudato Si* also serves as a manifesto for change on a global scale, challenging political leaders, businesses, and individuals to take concrete steps to protect the environment and promote social justice. The Pope denounces the ‘throwaway culture’ that prioritizes revenue generation and consumption over the welfare of people and the planet, calling for a shift towards a more sustainable and inclusive economic model. Pope Francis writes, “We need to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent decades.” (128) Here he highlights the need for a holistic approach to addressing the interconnected crises of social inequality and environmental degradation. The work most essentially looks for the well-being of all irrespective of their faith. O'Brien points out that, While the document is very clearly a work of Catholic Social Teaching, it explicitly seeks conversation with other faith traditions, with indigenous peoples, with scientists, and with others... it is respectful to understand the encyclical in the context of not only Catholic theology but also a diverse range of other efforts to think morally about the environmental and social challenges of the 21st century. (mdpi.com)

The principles outlined in *Laudato Si* have inspired a growing movement of environmental activists, policymakers, and concerned citizens who are working to implement the encyclical's vision of integral ecology. From grassroots initiatives to international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the influence of *Laudato Si* is being felt in diverse contexts around the world. The encyclical challenges us to reevaluate our relationship with the Earth and with each other, recognizing that our well-being is intimately connected to the health of the planet. Pope Francis suggests that both natural and social surroundings are interconnected ultimately because of the same wickedness: the belief that there are no undeniable facts concerning this matter. Many people have lost touch with their spiritual nature and the deeper meaning of life. It is not just a freedom that he generates for himself. Mankind cannot bring themselves into existence. He embodies both spirituality and determination, while also connecting with the natural world. The message of environmental conservation is not subjective or arbitrary. The document emphasizes the importance of recognizing the objective moral principles that underpin the care for our common home. the initial step towards

implementing corporate social responsibility is to acknowledge that everything is interconnected. A present that has a natural social aspect, which was not made by us nor designed by us. Utilizing our possessions solely for our benefit or following our desires has to be restricted to ensure their well-being and happiness. Even though businesses operate primarily to maximize profits for shareholders, they must also consider the effect of their actions on the environment and society at large. The concept of ‘everything is connected’ suggests that there is a holistic connection between different aspects, and all parties involved should gain advantages from their participation. In the business world, it is crucial to prioritize solidarity and preferential treatment toward the most economically disadvantaged individuals within society, who are particularly susceptible to a myriad of environmental, social, economic, and political influences. Governments and individuals must work together to address these inequalities and construct a more just and equitable society.

Integral Ecology

Integral Ecology is a concept that emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to studying and understanding the environment. The stories of creation found in the Book of Genesis include metaphorical and figurative language that represents the creation process. relevance, and meaningful insights into the nature of humanity’s past and present. The state of things as they truly are. related dimensions: the biological, the psychological, and the social. According to the document, the Pope has a clear preference for the term ‘ecology’ as opposed to the term ‘environment’. He says “Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop” (Pope Francis 103). The term ‘environment’ emphasizes the interdependence of everything more explicitly. behave and interact, rather than being an essential component. looking at the world through an ethical lens, rather than dividing it into unrelated areas. The concept of life can be compared to religion in one aspect, politics in another, and nature in yet another. Each sphere has almost no relation to the other. Instead, the encyclical emphasizes the importance of living with honesty, integrity, and moral values for both men and women. We should consider the concept of constant integration (hence the term ‘integral’). referring to our connections with the spiritual realm, with other people, and with the natural world. The pope highlights the importance of safeguarding the less fortunate and the environment.

Pope Francis stresses the interdependence of all living things and the necessity for a comprehensive solution to environmental challenges in *Laudato Si*. The central idea of integral ecology revolves around this notion. According to him, social, economic, and political difficulties are inextricably linked to ecological problems, and solving the environmental crisis requires a more coordinated strategy. Pope Francis urges that we design a more equitable and sustainable approach to development by acknowledging the interdependence of all living things and the significance of taking care of our shared home. Integral ecology emphasizes the necessity for a comprehensive strategy for sustainability that takes into consideration the environmental crises' social, economic, and other aspects.

Interconnected Connections: God, Human Beings, and the Planet

There is an integral connection between God, Human beings, and Earth. The Bible states that these three crucial connections have been fractured, both externally and internally. This break is an act of wrongdoing, the divine being responsible for the creation of all things, and the creations themselves are evident, of a higher power and trying to control and manipulate everything in existence. When it comes to God, we often reject the idea of recognizing our limitations as humans. Human beings and the natural world are deteriorating rapidly, leading to various negative impacts. Human beings and nature entered into a state of conflict when Adam sinned, God told him that his toil and labor would be difficult, and the ground would produce thorns and thistles. He would have to eat from the sweat of his brow until he returned to the ground from which he was made. To be mindful of our duty to protect and preserve the resources of the planet. Acknowledging that all living creatures hold their worth in the eyes of God. The Lord is blessed and glorified solely by their presence.

Man finds joy in everything he does, because of our special worthiness and our possession of a unique ability. Intelligence has created everything according to a specific set of rules and principles. *The Bible*, not only just exists as a religious text, but it also plays a vital role in other aspects of society. We declare that all other creatures are entirely under the control of and exist solely for the benefit of human beings. Humans are treated as if they lack inherent value and can be treated however, we desire. It is because everything is interconnected, and the issues we face today require a forward-thinking perspective. We must consider every factor of the worldwide dilemma. Now let's ponder certain aspects of a comprehensive environmental approach that highly values and honours its interconnectedness. The aspects of being human

and relating to others in society depend on the environment in which they live, even the surroundings in which they grow. This requires thinking and discussion, regarding what is necessary for the existence and continuation of society, as well as the importance of integrity. There is a need to inquire about certain models of development, production, and consumption. The interconnection between everything is extremely important and cannot be stressed enough. Therefore, it can be concluded that it leads to a deeper understanding and specialization in different areas. This has become a type of lack of knowledge unless they are incorporated into a more comprehensive perspective on the subject.

Our mistreatment of nature demonstrates our lack of concern for the poor. We must be concerned about this and must be expressed or demonstrated through collective support and unity. Duties of justice towards non-human beings and natural ecosystems for their intrinsic value and well-being must be taken into consideration. One argument against religion in previous times was that it required individuals to engage in worship. God seemed indifferent toward the welfare of mankind. Pope Francis now emphasizes the need for a more inclusive interpretation. It is believed that genuine faith necessitates treating God, others, and even oneself with fairness and righteousness. Naturally, our typical perception revolves around forming connections with other individuals. We cannot control the actions of others, so we must learn to adapt to different situations and circumstances accordingly. We can see that people do not typically consider the concept of developing a connection or bond with the planet. Pope Francis elucidates,

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (Pope Francis 104).

Earth has been provided with all that has been available to us in terms of food or resources from the land or sea. Much of this has been destroyed, just for enjoyment or aesthetic appeal, or harshness. It could be beneficial to take this into account here. It is crucial to acknowledge that the encyclical also confirms the inherent worth. The text implies that while the discussion involves non-human creatures and systems, it does not assign them an inherent or ultimate worth. We must consider a topic to examine its methodology and perspective. The significance lies in its broader critique of the technocratic model. We have gotten into the habit of perceiving earthly things due to this concept, regarding our utilization and control over it. Integral ecology refers to the concept of viewing ecology holistically. An essential connection exists between

integral ecology and the concept of the common good. The central and unifying principle of social ethics is a core belief that brings people together and guides their moral actions and decisions within society. Collective benefits that individuals in a society can enjoy when they work together for the betterment of all. Pope Francis writes, “Political institutions and various social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people’s awareness. So too is the Church. All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education (57)”.

This allows all members to thrive and flourish and they have relatively easy and extensive access to achieving their satisfaction. The idea of the common good also includes the welfare of future generations. The worldwide impact of neglect has been painfully highlighted by economic crises. our shared fate that includes future generations. There has been a long wait for action and the world community urges action now. We can no longer discuss sustainable development without acknowledging the importance of intergenerational solidarity. When we begin to contemplate the world, we will be passing on to future generations, we have a different perspective; we acknowledge that the world is a precious offering that we possess without any constraints.

Role of Evangelical Literature

Evangelical literature holds a significant role in shaping societal values and promoting change. We have to analyse the impact of Evangelical literature, specifically the encyclical, in fostering transformation within society. *Laudato Si* urges immediate action to lessen the effects of climate change brought on by humans and save the environment for the coming generations. To highlight the moral obligation of taking care of our shared home, the encyclical consults both scientific data and spiritual teachings. Pope Francis highlights the responsibility of humans to take care of creation and the interdependence of all living things. Pope Francis reiterates,

“There is a growing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet... Our goal 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 suffering, and thus to discover what each of us can do about it (Pope Francis 16).”

One of the critical manners by which Zealous writing like *Laudato Si* adds to cultural change is by testing winning standards and values. The encyclical censures the common ‘expendable culture’ that focuses on industrialism and benefits over the prosperity of individuals and the planet. It requires a shift in perspective toward a more ethical and sustainable way of life. By

scrutinizing the state of affairs, ‘fervent writing’ prompts people and networks to reevaluate their ways of behaving and perspectives, prompting significant discourse around the subject. In addition, outreach writing frequently moves activity and assembles networks to advocate for social and ecological equity. Pope Francis says that “the Earth, our house, is starting to seem to be a tremendous heap of foulness” and “the environment is a typical decent, having a place with all and implied for all” (Pope Francis 17-18). This is an ardent reminder for perusers and further stirs them to make substantial moves towards optimistic change. This can take the form of personal lifestyle adjustments or collective efforts to influence corporate entities and policymakers. Moreover, it involves joint efforts in cultivating exchange across various areas of society for effective transformation. By articulating a common moral system and moral standards, texts like *Laudato Si* give a shared conviction to different gatherings to meet up and pursue a shared objective. This can prompt the arrangement of associations between strict associations, ecological activists, policymakers, and business pioneers, intensifying the effect of backing endeavors and prompting more exhaustive arrangements. Zealous writing fills in as an impetus for change in the public eye by testing standards, motivating activity, and cultivating cooperation. By utilizing the force of moral and moral lessons, Outreach writing can resolve major problems, for example, environmental change and ecological debasement. As individuals and communities engage with these texts and internalize their message, they contribute to a more sustainable and just future for all. The role of Evangelical literature in driving societal transformation cannot be understated, and its influence will continue to shape our collective response to the challenges of our time.

Religion As Transformative Force

The Catholic Church is willing to engage in conversations with philosophical ideas; this is evident in its openness and willingness to discuss various viewpoints. This was able to create different combinations of faith and reason. The progress of the Church’s social teachings embodies a fusion of faith and reason. When it comes to societal problems, this lesson encourages us to become more diverse by incorporating new perspectives. Any technological remedy that science professes to provide will be ineffectual in resolving the issues, if humanity loses its direction and forgets the important reasons that allow us to coexist peacefully, make selfless efforts, and treat others with kindness, it will lead to significant issues in our world. Believers themselves must constantly experience a sense of belief that is being challenged to live in a manner that aligns with their religious beliefs and avoids contradicting them through

their actions and the things they do. We must constantly embrace and accept God's grace. Human beings continuously tap into their strongest beliefs regarding love, fairness, and harmony. Even with our actions in ways that are morally wrong, we need to correct our understanding of our principles to ensure that we act ethically in the future. With the mistreatment of the environment, exerting control over the natural world, involvement in conflict, and unfairness as believers, it is important for us to recognize that when we engage in acts of violence, we are failing to honour the valuable wisdom we have been tasked with safeguarding, protecting, maintaining, or conserving. Cultural boundaries in various periods frequently influenced, how people understood and interpreted these. Religions possess valuable moral and spiritual resources, and by continuously returning to their origins, they will have a stronger ability to address the demands of the present day. Pope Francis encourages us to reflect on our relationship with the environment through the transformative power of religious texts. He argues that religious texts, including the Bible, can provide us with a spiritual framework for understanding our role as stewards of the Earth. By deciphering these texts concerning maintainability, Pope Francis recommends that we foster a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of everyone and the significance of focusing on our natural home. A sense of responsibility and stewardship toward the Earth can be cultivated through this transformative approach to religious texts, which can help motivate action and alter attitudes toward sustainability.

Conclusion

“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. Serpi Oppermann, 1991)

To conclude, the crossing point of supportability and otherworldliness in *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis offers a strong message about the interconnectedness of every single living being and the importance of taking care of our shared residence. By perceiving the necessary association between people and the environment, thinking about the extraordinary force of strict texts, and embracing the idea of integral ecology, we can initiate to address the environmental emergency and work towards a more practical future. Pope Francis advises us that we must go about as stewards of the Earth and that by coordinating otherworldliness into our approach to sustainability, we can grow in our love of the natural world and increase our level of empathy

and compassion for all living things. Naturally, our typical perception revolves around forming connections with other individuals. Generally, people do not consider the concept of developing a connection or bond with the planet. However, it could be beneficial for the world if we claim to have a spiritual relationship with the earth.

The text implies that while the discussion involves non-human creatures and systems, it does not assign them an inherent or ultimate worth. It is crucial to acknowledge that the encyclical also confirms the inherent worth of all living beings. Further, the significance of the text lies in its broader critique of the technocratic model. We have gotten into the habit of perceiving earthly things due to this concept. Integral ecology, which refers to the concept of viewing ecology holistically is also discussed in the paper. An essential connection exists between integral ecology and the concept of the common good as Pope Francis reiterates time and again. The central and unifying principle of social ethics is a core belief or concept that brings people together and guides their moral actions and decisions within society. Pope Francis urges members of the community and the world at large to thrive and flourish collectively as it benefits society. The idea of the common good also includes the welfare of future generations. The worldwide impact of neglect has been painfully highlighted by economic crises and will impact future generations. We can no longer discuss sustainable development without acknowledging the importance of intergenerational solidarity.

In conclusion, evangelical literature like *Laudato Si* serves as a catalyst for change in society by challenging norms, inspiring action, and fostering collaboration. By leveraging the power of moral and ethical teachings, evangelical literature has the potential to address pressing issues such as climate change and environmental degradation. As individuals and communities engage with these texts and internalize their message, they contribute to a more sustainable and just future for all. The role of evangelical literature in driving societal transformation cannot be understated, and its influence will continue to shape our collective response to the challenges of our time.

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