

Laudato si' and Environmental Ethics

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Abstract: This paper examines the integration of ecological education, as articulated in Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* into a tertiary general-education course named Institutional Ethics. *Laudato si'* situates stewardship of creation within Catholic social thought and calls for an education that cultivates an experiential and moral awareness of humanity's interdependence with the natural world. At De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Institutional Ethics (IETHICS), a required course in the Theology and Philosophy area, includes a dedicated module under applied ethics, a topic on environmental ethics that uses *Laudato si'* as a primary resource. Using the See-Discern-Act pedagogical framework, this study evaluates how the module fosters ethical sensitivity, ecological literacy, and dispositions for responsible action among diverse undergraduate learners. The discussion highlights practical strategies for adapting '*Laudato si'*' to secular and pluralist tertiary contexts and offers a replicable model for embedding ecological education across general-education curricula.

Keywords: ecological education, environmental ethics, *Laudato si'*, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

The present state of the world is very dismal, in unimaginable proportions. “There is a so-called ‘environmental violence.’ When we say environmental violence, it need not be just pollution and destruction of the habitat or environs we human beings and other creatures dwell in but even the socio-economic and socio-political collapse of countries affecting hundreds of millions.”¹ Here in the Philippines, we have our own share of “environmental violence.” Other than the widespread pollution, environmental degradation leading to climate change and man-made calamities, we have very chaotic political dynamics. Just look at our chaotic Philippine Senate. This chaos does not just delay laws, it actively perpetuates a system where corruption kills people through inadequate environmental protection, policy paralysis, while accountability remains impossible. Another obvious proof of the widespread corruption is the so-called “flood control projects” anomalies, which showed how billions of pesos were pocketed by officials at the expense of unfinished or substandard flood mitigating projects.

No doubt corruption and pollution production is a sad fact of the human story but “much more is being produced than is needed to maximize the capacity for human flourishing such that literally millions of people are directly harmed and many more indirectly, causing more than eight million deaths annually.”² The direct and indirect harm experienced by humans due to corruption; and toxic and non-toxic pollutants put into a local and concurrently the global ecosystem through human activities and processes is indeed unimaginable and nightmarish in all aspects.

¹ Reuel Rito Seño, “Teaching *Laudato si’* and Ecological Education to College Students,” in *General Assembly of the Philippine Association of Tertiary Level. Environmental Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources* (Proceedings: Environmental Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2021), 1.

² Richard Marcantonio, *Environmental Violence: In the Earth System and the Human Niche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 14.

“The rising cry of the earth and the cry of the poor makes this a critical moment of concern in the history of the planet.”³ The prevailing profit-driven models of mass production, consumption, and development disproportionately affect the poor and the vulnerable,⁴ making them the first to bear the brunt of environmental problems. The poor are always at the receiving end of effects of the choices and actions of the rich, famous and the powerful when it comes to the environment.

It would seem that this “environmental violence” is very much responsible for alternative roots of the so-called “eco-social crisis,” “a crisis that manifests in broken relationships among human beings, between human and more-than-human beings, and between human beings and the divine.”⁵ All the things “gone-bad” in the world continuously violate what is good and right in creation, our common home and in the history of mankind.

Pope Francis’s *Laudato si'* reframes environmental concern as a moral imperative rooted in Catholic social thought, calling for an education that fosters awareness of humanity’s integral relationship with creation. This paper examines how those theological and ethical commitments were translated into an undergraduate general-education context through Institutional Ethics (IETHICS) at De La Salle–College of Saint Benilde. By foregrounding *Laudato si'* within a dedicated environmental ethics module, the course seeks not only to transmit ecological knowledge but to cultivate ethical sensibilities and capacities for practical stewardship.

Employing the See–Discern–Act pedagogical framework, the study describes the module’s learning objectives, instructional design, and assessment practices, and analyzes course artifacts, and instructor observations to evaluate pedagogical effectiveness. The paper argues that

³ Anthony Louis Lava, “De Dios Habita a Dios Labora A Mission of Caring for Our Common Home in the Ecological Crisis of India” (Dissertation: Santa Clara University Scholar Commons, 2020), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ James Robinson, “Merton and Ruether: Toward a Contemplative-Prophetic Ecotheological Anthropology” (Dissertation: Fordham University, 2020), 1.

integrating elements of *Laudato si'* and Environmental Ethics, attentive observation of ecological realities, critical moral reflection, and commitments to transformative action offers a replicable model for embedding ecological education across tertiary general-education curricula.

LAUDATO SI'

Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home, is the second encyclical of the late Pope Francis published in 2015, which touches upon key principles of Catholic Social Thought, primarily stewardship or care for creation or the environment. The document mentions explicitly the need to promote ecological education which is an education that promotes the environment. This ecological education should be instilled in both the young and the old for it leads to a profound reality, that is, the intimate relationship between human life and the moral law; and is very necessary for the proper treatment and protection of the environment and that of the whole of creation.

When one reads the encyclical, one can sense and feel the urgency in the late Pope's words. The Pope is addressing this encyclical to all races, creeds and backgrounds because the act or work for the care of creation cannot be delayed nor sidetracked any longer. It cannot be done by only a few because all of us are responsible. There is a need to act, and not just to act but "to act fast before it is too late."⁶ In fact, there are circles among the scientific community who say that it is already too late to counter the abuse that has already been done to the environment. We are all experiencing it right now with how typical storms in the past have become calamities that are catastrophic in unimaginable proportions, not mentioning the socio-political unrest and health-related uncertainties we face. The present

⁶ Reuel Rito Seño, "Insights from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*: Towards Ecological Citizenship for a Better World" (Proceedings: Universitas Indonesia Scholar Summit, 2017), 1296.

context and situation in many ways reflects the abuse and the misaligned priorities of our leaders and of the community. Indeed, it may seem too late, yet, on our part we beg to disagree. We must try our best, lest we surrender without a good fight to what can still be done and accomplished. We can only be hopeful that our efforts are not futile and that future generations can still enjoy the fruits and blessings of God's creation.

The encyclical dares to speak that there is both a need to act individually and collectively, which is a holistic way of seeing this advocacy and stewardship for creation and the environment. Indeed, "there is a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but [are] joined in a splendid universal communion."⁷ The idea being lobbied is very straightforward: everything is important and everything has to be given due concern and attention, from the environment surrounding us, our God-given natural resources; to the poor begging on the streets; even the precious unborn in the womb; or the convicted drug addict on death row - all of them are part of creation and should be given the chance to live another day. "If we destroy creation, creation will destroy us" according to Pope Francis, thus the advocacy for the environment and which definitely includes all of life and that which has life is not something that can be taken not seriously, not even the second priority in policy-making, but it has to be given much weight and importance, as equally important as justice, peace and order, which are all ingredients for individual and collective flourishing and development.

The encyclical has had and continues to receive a warm reception from within and without the Catholic Church. It was warmly received even by peoples from the other faith beliefs or religions and is seen in some circles "using the literary approach (reading, writing, and storytelling) that registers the complexity of the links between global inequality and

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015), sec. 220.

ecological distress as a remedy to the modern novel's political inefficacy."⁸ The call, then, is for a literature and growing body of knowledge that espouses the need for structural and systemic, rather than individual moral redress, "founded broadly along the lines of injustice marked by the long history of imperial conquest and colonial oppression, which has marred the efforts that have been done in addressing this problem, calls for a shift from false to genuine reality."⁹ Thus, the need to address the wrongs committed in the past whether it be ecological, economical, political or personal wrongs, all of them have to be brought to the reckoning of what is just and right.

Pope Francis in the encyclical provides deep insights into "the systemic flows and paradigmatic concerns that currently shape human (often negative) interactions with nature as well as astute commentary on the holistic changes needed to address these issues."¹⁰ We cannot deny the abuse on creation and on the environment every time we see the waste and destruction all around us, the piling up of trash, denudation of our natural and also human resources; through the curtailing of numerous human lives and human rights, a good example of which are the "modern untouchables, referring to the unborn, drug addicts and criminals and the like.

After decades of declining interest in the environment, "*Laudato si'*" may be catalyzing societal transformation similar to that performed by the 1969 encyclical *Humanae vitae*"¹¹ by Pope Paul VI. That is how revolutionary the encyclical is and not just for the Catholic Church but even for people of good will and those among us, a growing number, who stand

⁸ Martin Premoli, "Global Anthropocene Fiction and the Politics of Climate Disaster" (Dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 2020), 138.

⁹ Lisa Sideris, "Techno-Science, Integral Thought, and the Reality of Limits in *Laudato Si'*," in *The Trumpeter*, 34:1. (2018), 14.

¹⁰ For this discussion, see Hrishabh Sandilya, "Analysing *Laudato Si'*: on Care for Our Common Home, from the Perspective of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development" (Master's Thesis: Uppsala Universitet, 2020).

¹¹ Malcolm McCallum, "Perspective: Global country-by-country response of public interest in the environment to the papal encyclical, *Laudato si'*," in *Biological Conservation* 235 (2019), 1.

not just for themselves and their loved ones but for the protection of all of creation and that of the environment.

INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS (IETHICS)

Institutional Ethics or IETHICS is one of the general education courses taught under the Theology and Philosophy Area of the School of Multidisciplinary Studies of De La Salle-College of Benilde in Manila, Philippines. As a general education course, all students are required to take and pass this course. According to the description “The course invites students to explore the principles of ethical behavior in modern society at the level of the individual, society, and in interaction with the environment and other shared resources (CMO No. 20, s. 2013). This ethical behavior is consistent with how a free human being like you ought to live your life in relation to other people and the environment. It will guide you to make moral decisions by using moral frameworks that are responsive to existential moral dilemmas.”¹² One of the course outcomes of the course states that “to cultivate a sense of responsibility towards the common good integrating principles of ethical behavior into personal conduct and societal interactions by embodying these principles within modern society to promote ethical living and contribute positively to the community.”¹³

One particular module in this undergraduate course is on how the ethical theories and frameworks can be applied to particular scenarios or situations. One of which is on environmental ethics or using the words of the encyclical, “caring for God’s creation”¹⁴ or in other words ecological education.

¹² “IETHICS Course Description,” (Syllabus: De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Manila, 2023), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ For this discussion, see Lava, “De Dios Habita a Dios Labora.”

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Education is perceived as “the total of the processes and impacts that aim at changing a person’s behavior into the standard educational norms of a certain society.”¹⁵ “Contemporary education faces various problems and challenges, which result from the economic, business, social and cultural transformations; and among the basic characteristics of society in which contemporary man lives are globalization, mass scale temporariness and consumerism.”¹⁶ On the other hand, ecological Education,” is an education that promotes the environment. “Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life”;¹⁷ and by which it stresses the crucial role of the human family, which is the place where life is begotten and where life is seen as a gift from God, the creator. It is through the family where ecological education starts to develop. Thus, “the family has to be welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed today, so that it can develop and flourish in accordance with what constitutes authentic human development. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.”¹⁸

Ecological Education should be instilled in both young and old for it leads to a profound reality that “the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment.”¹⁹ The late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI spoke of an “ecology of man,” based on the fact that “man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.”²⁰

¹⁵ Grzegorz J. Pyżlak, “Education of children and young people in Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia* and *Laudato Si*,” in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79:2 (2023), a8624, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ Francis, *Laudato si*, sec. 213.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Ecology of Man: Benedict XVI’s Address before the German Parliament,” in *Benedictus XVI* (22 September 2011), <<https://www.benedictusxvi.com/addresses/benedict-xvis-address-before-the-german-parliament>>.

It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home.”²¹ Acknowledging this gift as freely given, we too are to be thankful and to take care of these gifts, staying authentic to our roles as worthy stewards of creation.

Ecological Education proposes “a new kind of democratic education that will inculcate knowledge of the land and community, helping cultivate ecological belonging in the public sphere while making environmental stewardship a defining political goal.”²² It need not only focus on popular activities of outdoor recreation and “helps people recognize the nonhuman homes around them, their environment”²³ but that “it should allow us to feel epistemically at home in the land, that is, to encounter the land and its nonhuman inhabitants as intelligible to us and worthy of understanding and respect; rather than as irrelevant perceptual white noise or as resources only used for our mere pleasure.”²⁴ There should be some way this course of study or development that is called ecological education can be integrated in the present formal education, that is, in the form of an experience or spirituality unless we say that the work of environmental protection and promotion are only for the scientific expert and the not so lowly politician who will help enact policies and laws for the benefit of the environment. “The aim of education is to make people aware of the influence of human behaviour on the condition of the environment.”²⁵ Thus, “ecological education should deal with transmitting knowledge about the natural environment; it should warn against the activity which can be

²¹ Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 155.

²² Gregory Koutnik, “In Defense of Home: The Politics of Ecological Belonging” (Dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 2020), 73.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Pyżlak, “Education of children and young people,” 4.

harmful to the natural environment, and about the results which man can experience when harming the environment.”²⁶

Pope Francis directly refers to “anthropocentrism as one of the most controversial points of the contemporary ecological debate.”²⁷ This anthropocentrism is detrimental to the cause of ecological education because it places human beings in the center of everything and if the human being is in the center he may do as he likes with the other elements of creation. “Education is essential to achieving the goals of fostering ecological awareness, and coordinating policies to drive systemic change.”²⁸ Initiatives that “combine moral education with practical training, such as repair skills, circular design, and resource management, ensure that individuals and communities actively participate in ecological transformation.”²⁹ By promoting “closed-loop processes through practices such as reuse, recycling, regeneration, and remanufacturing, the circular economy fosters ecofriendly innovation, minimizes environmental harm, and encourages sustainable growth that respects planetary boundaries.”³⁰

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overall objective of this research is to showcase how ecological education as proposed in *Laudato si'* was integrated in the general education course Institutional Ethics, and how it can also be taught and integrated in other courses in the tertiary level through the integration of key elements of “ecological education” using the See-Judge-Act pedagogical framework of social analysis.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ Yong-Gil Lee, “Integrating Circular Economy and Laudato Si’: A Christian Framework for Sustainable Development and Environmental Stewardship,” in *Religions*, 16:3 (2025), 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

RESEARCH DESIGN, APPROACHES, AND METHODS

The encyclical *Laudato si'* clearly “demonstrates the Church’s appropriation of Liberation Theology’s philosophical framework.”³¹ and since Liberation Theology is radical and progressive, this approach is seen as a new direction of the Church concerning climate change and advocacy for creation and the environment who has always been seen as conservative and pacifist.

Since this is a Philosophical paper, and in some circles considered under the domain of the Humanities or the Liberal Arts, the researcher has decided that he will employ qualitative research that is expository in nature (textual exposition) with key elements that will be culled directly from the primary text (the encyclical) and allied texts and other commentaries that will contribute to a better understanding of the vocation and challenge to ecological education; and how this ecological or environmental education can be integrated in other courses in the tertiary level, whether it be non-sectarian or government-run schools. It can also be a reflective-practical way of putting into action the inspiration brought forth from the encyclical in our individual and collective lives.

The framework that will be used for this research will be along the lines of the See-Judge-Act pedagogical framework of social analysis. “There will be innovative ways of considering things that will be proposed as a viable paradigm for the holistic pedagogical approach of ecological education.”³²

When we say “Seeing,” it is about grounding oneself in the lived experiences of others, as well as taking a hard look at oneself, or where one stands and communes. It can also include resources that are available to oneself, whether be print, electronic or even through social media.

³¹ Ernesto Hernández, “Climate Change and Liberation in Latin America” (Dissertation: University of South Florida, 2020), 63.

³² Seño, “Teaching *Laudato si'*,” 5.

The word “Judging” is about taking the time to interrogate and scrutinize our values, belief systems, behavior and the resources or materials we have received; as well as striving to understand how the various systems and structures of our society affects others.³³

Finally, when we say “Acting,” we must act not just individually but also collectively. Indeed, we must think things differently and do things differently compared to what we are so used to in the past. We must honor the progress, whether small or large. We should never stop striving to dismantle the systems and structures that cause these inequities and inequalities in our midst, taking well into account the possible risks and even make sacrifices; calling for peace rooted in justice, smartly deploying our talents, capabilities and financial resources to reform the unjust systems to ensure sustained progress today and beyond.”³⁴

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Using the See-Judge-Act framework helps us in the reevaluation of power relationships, especially in pedagogy. “It becomes central to articulate new paradigms of sustainability, from the perspective of the oppressed, that will create a sustainable culture through self-motivation and epistemic autonomy and actions based on integral knowledge.”³⁵ There is a need to review and scrutinize the body of knowledge that we have received and are so used to; and possibly the enhancement of the present curriculum is needed in order to appropriate ecological education in our tertiary level courses and programs. This paper proposes the following themes as the fruits of this research.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Hernández, “Climate Change and Liberation in Latin America,” 138.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Environmental issues should not be considered as separate learning content or digressions, they should rather be more integrated in the learning process in science education.”³⁶ Lessons on care for the environment and the protection of our natural resources can very much be integrated in our present courses; of course, done with careful research, planning and execution. There is ample evidence that “the extensive network of religious schools and universities occupies a key interstitial space in promoting eco-literary and ensuring, at the same time, inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,”³⁷ which very much includes activities and advocacies that are for the benefit of the environment. “There is said to be a consistent call for houses of formation and seminaries to provide an integrated ecological education”³⁸ and not only these types of institutions but also other educational and formation houses which emphasizes “the need for new, deeper, and interrelated environmental education since in most parts of the current educational systems there still is not too much in terms of promotion of basic ethical and moral values for the care of creation.”³⁹ There are more and more colleges and universities that are offering religion with ecology courses. There are also being offered double degree programs with minors in environmental studies and natural resource management. This is an important stage in the shaping of the new branch of knowledge,

³⁶ Mona Schönfelder and Franz Bogner, “Between Science Education and Environmental Education: How Science Motivation Relates to Environmental Values,” in *Sustainability Basel*, 12:5 (2020), 11.

³⁷ Jaime Tatay and Catherine Devitt, “Sustainability and Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Islamochristiana*, 43 (2017), 133.

³⁸ Lucas Briola, “Sustainable Communities and Eucharistic Communities: Laudato Si’: Northern Appalachia, and Redemptive Recovery,” in *Journal of Moral Theology*, 2:1 (2017), 33.

³⁹ Dietrich Werner and Elisabeth Jeglitzka, *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), 291.

definitely “marked by the introduction into university-level education religion and ecology subjects.”⁴⁰

A MUCH-NEEDED PARADIGM SHIFT: FROM OUR OLD WAYS TO NEW

To minimize the belief that humans are separate from nature, it has been claimed that a new model of ecological citizenship is needed that views and appreciates familiar and mundane spaces as worthy of environmental protection, and that promoted a “broader sense of responsibility for spaces beyond the wilderness that informs its developing mission of creating an ecological paradigm shift that recognizes the interdependence of humans, the Earth, and other species.”⁴¹ There is a need “to overcome the current technocratic paradigm and the throwaway culture”⁴² by adhering to new values and ways of doing things, take for example the promotion of the three R’s: reduce, reuse and recycle.

CALL FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Laudato si’ calls for sustainability. The lens of sustainability provides a powerful vision for community engagement in initiatives of equity, spirituality and stewardship. Thus, the linking of one’s mission to environmental sustainability and resilience will be integrated into one’s curricular and extracurricular programs so that one’s institution can be the leader in best sustainable practices among universities and form new leaders in sustainable practices.

⁴⁰ Ryszard Sadowski, “The Potential of Religion in the Promotion and Implementation of the Concept of Sustainable Development,” in *Sciendo*, 24:1 (2017), 42.

⁴¹ Audra Barber, “An Eco-Spiritual Approach to Solving Climate Change: An Applied, Ethnographic Study of Communication and Spirituality in an Environmental Organization” (Master’s Thesis: University of Colorado at Boulder, 2020), 99.

⁴² Martin Carbajo Nuñez, *Sister Mother Earth: Franciscan Roots of the Laudato Si* (Phoenix, AZ: Tau Publishing, 2018), 26.

Sustainability integration in tertiary level through a sociological perspective has received limited attention. Discussion of this topic using symbolic interactionism has received even less. Unlike other theories, interactionism pays attention to interactions between individuals, their roles, and the greater purposes and processes they are acting for and within. “There is a need to investigate this transition in various institutional types and at HEIs with different levels of sustainability integration.”⁴³

RELIGION SEEN IN A BETTER LIGHT

Laudato si' rejects the framework that draws “sharp divisions between science and politics and relegates religion to the private sphere.”⁴⁴ Indeed, nothing short of this does justice to the enormous reality of religion in the world; its power for good and evil; its capacity for promoting peace and human dignity or for promoting war and oppression; its ability to give meaning and motivation to people’s lives; its influence on everything from family life and community to politics, economics, and global environmental responsibility. Furthermore, because human life involves existential, moral, and spiritual questions that cannot be adequately addressed (or addressed at all) by an educational system in servitude to scientism, secularism, and the market economy, a revolution in education is needed. “Religions offer ethical visions for thoughtful consideration, visions whose grounding claims to be not an “overlapping consensus” concerning individual rights and constitutional procedures, but the solid ground of an Ultimate Horizon.⁴⁵ Thus, there is some benefit in the statement “violating

⁴³ For this discussion, see Tracy Harvey, “Sustainability Integration in Higher Education Institutions: The Meaning of “Greening” and Attention to Interaction” (Dissertation: The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2021).

⁴⁴ Paul Lynch, “On Care for Our Common Discourse: Pope Francis’s Nonmodern Epideictic,” in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 47:5 (2017), 463.

⁴⁵ For this discussion, see Kevin Dowd, “Toward a More Perfect Union: Religion and Education in American Public Schools” (Dissertation: Boston College, 2021).

creation means violating God.”⁴⁶ This is a mantra that can consciously make people think twice before committing any harm or violence on the environment. Sin is not just a transgression against God, others and ourselves for it also includes transgressions against the environment, which was created by God himself.

We have seen that “contemporary religion has responded with the call for ecological conversion, coinciding with secular institutions and disciplines, and is gaining awareness by the broader field of ecology due to the growing multitudes of environmentalism in religious doctrine and that religious communities are equal opportunity victims of climate change.”⁴⁷ The present situation has shown “the reality of sin and the ruptures it creates; the ruptures that clearly affect the human person in the spiritual, personal, social, and environmental aspects, thereby getting in the way of holistic human development.”⁴⁸ This gives rise to this so-called “Ecotheology” wherein there is a growing perception that the secular institutions of the world are not sufficient in solving the world’s plethora of environmental problems, nor are they capable of solving the underlying social problems. Of course, religion is neither a conclusive mode of action or an unburdened form of comprehension, and it finds itself embattled with itself and with the wider society. Therefore, it is necessary to be selective. We cannot deny that “religion remains a powerful entity whose influence sways a large demographic in some of the most consequential places in the world.”⁴⁹ For one it can contribute to raising awareness and change a society’s behavior. “These religions are in an exceptional position to reach out to people of all areas and disciplines to join the fight against social

⁴⁶ For this discussion, see Lava, “De Dios Habita a Dios Labora.”

⁴⁷ Tian Yang Kevin Xu, “Building Ecotheology: Nature Veneration in Architecture and Its Contributions to Environmental Stewardship” (Dissertation: University of Cincinnati, 2020), 10.

⁴⁸ Francis Onyekozuru, “Integral Human Development in the Thought of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis” (Thesis: The Catholic University of America, 2021), 114.

⁴⁹ Xu, “Building Ecotheology,” 10.

injustice and environmental degradation.”⁵⁰ Indeed, this advocacy for the environment should be seen in an integrated and holistic way.

INTEGRAL AND HOLISTIC ECOLOGY

There is a proposal for an Integral Ecology as a vision for success in this endeavor and a solution to the many systemic faults that can be identified. Premised on “a humanist approach that is both comprehensive and broad-based it is focused on ideas like justice, common good, generational solidarity and different types of ecological interconnectedness—social, environmental, cultural and human”⁵¹, a so-called “sense of interdependence.”⁵² “There is an intimate link between “the plight of the earth and the plight of the poor”⁵³ because the environmental and the social crisis are not two separate crises but one complex crisis which is social and environmental. That means that we have to approach this complex crisis with a concept that “includes us humans holistically and redefines our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to nature.”⁵⁴ Integral and holistic ecology is not merely to be studied as a subject for those who are curious but rather it is “a vital part of a holistic education”⁵⁵ that leads to a conversion and a certain form of spirituality.

⁵⁰ Myoung-Ho Sin, “Homo Oikos Sacralis: Redefining Human Being in the Face of the Environmental Crisis” (Dissertation: Graduate Theological Union, 2021), 127.

⁵¹ For this discussion, see Sandilya, “Analysing Laudato Si’.”

⁵² Barber, “An Eco-Spiritual Approach to Solving Climate Change,” 85.

⁵³ Kapyra Kaoma, “Post Edinburgh 2010 Christian Mission: Joys, Issues and Challenges,” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 150 (2014), 126.

⁵⁴ Sin, *Homo Oikos Sacralis* 128.

⁵⁵ Anne Clifford, “The Significance of Pope Francis’s Prophetic Call: ‘Care for Our Common Home’ for Northern Appalachia,” in *Journal of Moral Theology*, 2:1 (2017), 20.

ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AND ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

The education of young and old alike, will hopefully lead toward the type of “ecological conversion,”⁵⁶ which is a conversion tied to ecological spirituality. Ecological conversion involves “seeing the environment anew, as a living creation, a gift of God, not as a mere resource⁵⁷ that can be misused and abused. John Paul II applied it in the sense of a conversion in thoughts and behaviors in respecting humans and loving the natural world. It is likened to turning our values “inside out” for a ‘coming home’ to our humble and rightful place in the universe. “Ecological conversion is achievable just as personal conversion of hearts is achievable, even though authentic conversion is always a response to God’s gift of grace.”⁵⁸ This ecological conversion and ecological spirituality should lead us to practice environmental ethics.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Ethics, and especially environmental ethics, is about what needs to be done now.⁵⁹ “As mentioned in the previous sections that there is a need to act and not just to act but to act right now, environmental ethics, therefore, has to be integrated with climate change ethics.”⁶⁰ There is a sense of urgency in this call for swift and concerted effort. Environmental ethics has to be integrated with climate change ethics. “There is an awareness that there is

⁵⁶ Derek Hostetter, “An Integral Eucharist? Pope Francis, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Ecology’s Relationship to Eucharist,” in *Journal of Moral Theology*, 2:1 (2017), 54.

⁵⁷ Onyekozuru, “Integral Human Development,” 89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Patrick Byrne, *Toward Environmental Wholeness: Method in Environmental Ethics and Science* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2024), 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

a great need for a holistic approach to environmental and climate change ethics.”⁶¹

The correct way of carrying out environmental ethics is through “integral ecology.” “This is a vision of “the universe as a whole” in which “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.”⁶² This after all is that which is written in the course description of the course IETHICS which is “to explore the principles of ethical behavior in modern society at the level of the individual, society, and in interaction with the environment and other shared resources.”

Proper environmental ethics also entail that trust and belief also play major roles in the practices of scientists. At the earliest stages of their education, scientists trust their teachers and textbooks and lab manuals. “Women and men begin their initiations into scientific disciplines by believing that what they are being taught is true.”⁶³ There is that basic trust and assurance that what they are being taught is right and good, and not mere propaganda. “Human beings have the special value of being stewards of the continuation of the emerging good.”⁶⁴ The discussions so far have and in doing ethics affirmed a new paradigm, which is the notion of “our common home.” This position supports another trend in environmental ethics known as “lifeboat ethics” wherein we have to take care of what we have or else we will not survive. This is “an imminent necessity for a renewed ethics of responsibility.”⁶⁵ That we are responsible not just for ourselves but for each other.

The reasons for the ecological crisis are due to the philosophy of the modern era, which is a separation between a description of reality (ecology)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁵ Lorenzo Orioli, “Laudato si' and the New Paradigm of Catholic Environmental Ethics: Reflections on Environmentalist Movements in Italy,” in *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 29:6 (2016), 938.

and its ethical rules (economy). There is this dichotomy between these two concepts, a separation of facts and values. “Modern culture today cannot learn from the limits of reality. Humankind has lost its ability to recognize both symbols and ethical messages, which are, instead, an intrinsic part of reality.”⁶⁶ “Belief in the livingness of creation also entails a moral duty to protect and care for environmental ecology and human ecology, because in African religious traditions, there is a vital bond between them.”⁶⁷ This concept of interconnectedness is a recurring theme in the social teachings of the Church.

The goal of education is not merely to provide technical skills but to foster ecological citizenship which is a new sense of belonging and restored relationship with God, our neighbor and the earth. “The goal of education was not simply to provide information but formation, that is, the cultivation of various ecological virtues, namely: care for creation, self-esteem, simplicity of life, sense of beauty, rhythm, gratitude, and service for the common good.”⁶⁸

“Pope Francis highlights the moral and ethical imperatives for ecological conversion, urging a rejection of the so-called “throwaway culture” that prioritizes short-term profit over ecological and human well-being.”⁶⁹ He urges individuals and communities to adopt lifestyles of simplicity, moderation, and responsible consumption, echoing “the circular economy’s emphasis on reducing material demand through shared ownership, product longevity, and repair-based systems.”⁷⁰ “Governments

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “Foreword,” in *African Ecological Ethics and Spirituality for Cosmic Flourishing: An African Commentary on Laudato Si’*, ed. by Stan Chu Ilo (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁹ Lee, “Integrating Circular Economy and Laudato Si’,” 8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

[should] recognize and institutionalize community-based ecological stewardship initiatives rooted in religious ethics.”⁷¹

“Humanity's moral responsibility to care for creation through moral reform has shown how ethical values rooted in religious teachings can offer a more inclusive and community- centered approach to environmental governance.”⁷² The encyclical *Laudato si'* can be a good impetus or driving force behind the rallying call to take up environmental ethics as a priority for one and all.

CONCLUSION

The integration of *Laudato si'* into the course Institutional Ethics (IETHICS) demonstrates that ecological education can be meaningfully taught not only as an environmental or scientific concern, but as a moral, social, spiritual, and civic responsibility. The ecological crisis is not merely a problem of pollution, climate change, or resource misuse; it is also a crisis of values, relationships, governance, justice, and human responsibility. By presenting environmental destruction alongside corruption, poverty, consumerism, political paralysis, and the suffering of vulnerable communities, the discussion affirms one of the central insights of the encyclical that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inseparable. Using *Laudato si'* in a college course such as Institutional Ethics (IETHICS) is therefore pedagogically appropriate because it allows students to connect ethical theories with real and urgent social problems. The encyclical becomes more than a religious document; it functions as a framework for forming ecological citizens who are capable of seeing environmental issues as questions of justice, human dignity, interdependence, and the common good. This is especially important in the Philippine context, where

⁷¹ Nuruddin Al Akbar, “Decolonizing Environmental Law: Laudato Si’ and Al-Mizan as Political-Legal Paradigms for Environmental Justice,” in *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 1537:1, 012057 (2025), 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 10.

environmental degradation is often linked with corruption, weak policy implementation, poverty, and preventable disasters. Students are invited to understand that care for creation is not optional, secondary, or merely sentimental. It is an essential part of ethical living.

The See–Judge–Act framework strengthens this integration because it moves students from awareness to reflection and finally to responsibility. In the “Seeing” stage, students are encouraged to examine concrete ecological realities in their communities, campuses, homes, and society. In the “Judging” stage, they critically evaluate these realities using ethical theories, Catholic social thought, sustainability principles, and the concept of integral ecology. In the “Acting” stage, they are challenged to translate reflection into practical commitments, whether through personal lifestyle changes, community-based initiatives, advocacy, research, or institutional reform. This method prevents ecological education from becoming a purely theoretical matter but that it transforms the person from within and without.

The broader value of *Laudato si’* lies in its capacity to bridge disciplines. Although it is rooted in Catholic social teaching, its many insightful themes are relevant to science, business, design, governance, communication, hospitality, technology, social sciences, and even the arts. Its concern for integral ecology can help students see that their future professions are connected to environmental responsibility. A business student can reflect on ethical production and consumption; a design student can explore circular design and sustainable materials; a hospitality student can study waste reduction and responsible tourism; a communication student can develop campaigns for ecological awareness; and a technology student can consider the environmental costs of innovation. In this way, *Laudato si’* can serve as a common ethical language across the curriculum.

Ultimately, the use of *Laudato si’* in tertiary education should not be limited to teaching students about the environment. Its deeper purpose is formation: the cultivation of ecological conversion, responsibility,

simplicity, gratitude, justice, and care for the common home. The goal is to help students recognize that environmental ethics is not separate from personal ethics, social ethics, political ethics, or professional ethics. To care for creation is to care for human life, the poor, future generations, and the conditions that make authentic human flourishing possible.

Schools should integrate *Laudato si'* across the general education curriculum, not only in theology or ethics courses. While Institutional Ethics is a natural home for the encyclical, its themes can also enrich courses in science, social science, business, design, communication, technology, tourism, and the humanities. Each course can adapt the text according to its disciplinary focus while preserving its core message of integral ecology.

Faculty members should use the See–Judge–Act framework as a common pedagogical model for ecological education. This framework is flexible enough to be used in different courses. For example, science courses may use “Seeing” through environmental observation and data gathering; business courses may use “Judging” through ethical analysis of production and consumption; and design or technology courses may use “Acting” through sustainability projects, prototypes, or advocacy outputs. The framework ensures that students do not merely learn concepts but are guided toward responsible action.

Course activities should be contextualized in local realities. Students should be asked to examine ecological problems in their own respective communities, such as flooding, waste disposal, air pollution, food insecurity, overconsumption, or the loss of crucial green spaces. This makes the encyclical *Laudato si'* more concrete and relevant. In the Philippine setting, discussions may also include corruption, disaster risk, urban congestion and traffic, poverty, and environmental injustice. Such contextualization helps students understand that ecology is not an abstract global issue but a lived local concern.

Future research should examine how *Laudato si'* can be implemented in specific disciplines and how students respond to it over

time. Studies may evaluate whether exposure to ecological education changes students' attitudes, habits, civic engagement, or professional values. This can help schools refine their approaches and develop stronger models for integrating environmental ethics across higher education.

Finally, *Laudato si'* offers educational institutions a rich and relevant framework for forming students who are ethically aware, socially responsible, and ecologically committed. Its integration into other courses can help transform education from the mere transmission of knowledge into the formation of persons who are ready to care for creation, serve the common good, and act with responsibility in a world that is wounded by sin and corruption.

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