



The Importance of Ecological Conversion for the Care of the Earth and Human Health in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*



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ABSTRACT

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Based on the reading of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: On Care for Our Common Home, this article contends that the health of the Earth and human well-being are closely related to one another. That is why the ecological crisis is a serious threat not only to the health of the Earth but also to humans. Facing an ecological crisis that threatens the health of the Earth and humankind, how does Catholicism respond, especially through the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*? Using content analysis and interpretive methods of the texts in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, this essay concludes and suggests the importance of ecological conversion to overcoming the ecological crisis to care for the health of the Earth and its people. For this reason, it is important to change the exploitative paradigm into a paradigm that is friendly and caring for the Earth in humans themselves. This shifting paradigm must also be manifested in shared behavior through the Earth care movement and human health concerns as a realization of ecological conversion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Through the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: *On Our Common Home* (hereinafter abbreviated as LS) [1], Pope Francis presents the Catholic religion that prioritizes health and environmental damage conditions that endanger human well-being. After carefully reading the LS, I found that prioritizing the health of people, society and the environment is one of Pope

Francis's concerns in caring for the Earth, our common home, which is the main theme of the Encyclical.

This article aims to elaborate on the topic of Catholic attention to the importance of ecological conversion in the care of the Earth and human health in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. This goal is achieved by using content analysis and methods of interpreting the texts in the LS Encyclical.

As a result, it can be concluded without a doubt that the concern of Pope Francis as the supreme leader of the religion and the Catholic Church toward health is very high. Thus, the Encyclical which is intended for the care of the Earth, our common home, has also an important meaning for the health of the Earth and human well-being.

It is strictly taught that the development process that prioritizes as much profit as possible and in the shortest possible time endangers the lives of present and future generations, as well as in terms of health. LS reminds us of the effects of a certain type of development on the quality of life in industrialized areas that causes pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of mankind [2].

In this article, I first describe the topic of the health of the Earth and people. These topics are scattered throughout the encyclical with various contexts. Furthermore, based on the description, I explained that the ecological crisis that befell the Earth has become a serious threat to the health of the Earth and humans. In step three, I explained the importance of ecological conversion for the health of the Earth and people. This article closes with conclusions and recommendations for realizing Earth care for the health of the Earth and humans.

II. THE TOPIC OF HEALTH IN THE ENCYCLICAL LAUDATO SI'

The encyclical LS is Pope Francis's most important responsibility as the supreme leader of the catholic church regarding the ecological crisis. Pope Francis expressed deep concern in loving tenderness over the ecological crises of the last two centuries (LS 46, 51, 102), based on a multidisciplinary scientific study from the perspectives of the magisterium, theology, spirituality,

liturgy, and practice [3], [4].

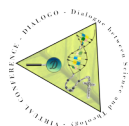
LS's theme is caring for the Earth, our common home, which is being hit by an ecological crisis. Beginning with an explanation of the foundation, background, context, and purpose, LS closed with a prayer for the Earth [5], [6]. Pope Francis views the ecological crisis as a consequence of "irresponsible human behavior" (LS 6). Written using the see, judge, and act method, LS is significantly relevant for the present and the future [7], including in relation to the health of the Earth and humans.

Carefully reading the LS, we could find topics about health that are scattered in the ELS. In the ELS text, at least, there are twenty-one times the words health, unhealthy, healthy, and healthier (LS 20, 21, 28, 44, 50, 98, 112, 126, 142, 155, 177, 181, 183, 193, 195, 197, 206, 215, 218, 224, 226). The word is used in various contexts, whether it is related to the health of the Earth and humans, both physically and mentally, including "a healthy economy" [8].

Pope Francis called the health problems of the poor the cause of millions of premature deaths. It is caused by various forms of pollution that people experience every day. The Pope verifies as follows:

"People get sick, for example, from constantly inhaling the fumes of high-level fuels used for cooking or heating homes. Another pollution affects everyone, caused by transportation, industrial fumes, substances that contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agro toxins in general" (LS 20).

Earth and human health are also damaged by "industrial waste as well as chemical products used in cities and agricultural areas" which "cause the buildup of chemicals in the organisms of the local population." Unfortunately,



new action is taken “when there has been permanent damage to public health” (LS 21).

Health problems are also associated with the availability of clean water. Pope Francis reminded us that “sources of clean fresh water are necessary for health care, agriculture, and industry. Water reserves used to be relatively stable, but now in many places, demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term” (LS 28).

The excessive and uncontrolled growth of many cities also has an impact on human health. Urban planning becomes an unhealthy place to live in. This is caused by “pollution caused by toxic emissions and urban chaos, poor transportation, and visual pollution and noise” (LS 44).

In that context, Pope Francis invites all of us to expand our vision of life to be healthier. The Pope writes:

“Yet we can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, and more integral. Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation, and community” (LS 112).

III. ECOLOGICAL CRISIS THREATENING THE EARTH AND HUMAN HEALTH

Based on textual data on health in the Ls, I found Pope Francis’s basic concern that the ecological crisis threatens the health of the Earth and people. The close link between the Encyclical Ls and concerns over health issues can be placed in the context of understanding that it is primarily a document about what it means to be a

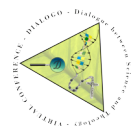
fully human being. In this context, we are challenged to recognize that degradation and ecological crisis pose a serious threat to the health of the Earth and humans.

Citing the ecological concerns of his predecessor, Pope Paul VI (1971), Pope Francis asserted, “Due to the perceived unwholesome exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and in turn becoming a victim of this degradation” (LS 4). Through the LS Pope Francis affirms the determination of everyone to do their best to prevent the destruction of the natural environment and climate change and their negative impact on the health of the Earth and people. The Pope even provides guidelines as a guide for moral beliefs (LS 163-201). Pope Francis challenges everyone to take care of the Earth, our common home. The reason is the ecological crisis is a very serious problem risking the life of human health.

The ecological crisis threatens the vulnerability of the health of the Earth and humans. The sincerity of working together to care for the Earth can help build the economic, social, and health conditions of the poor and disadvantaged in a sustainable manner [9].

We all have a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of human existence by promoting healthy behaviors, preventing and controlling the emergence of new diseases, ensuring access to health care, and supporting the healing of diseases of the vulnerable and the poor [10].

Referring to Timothy Harvie’s idea, human civilization has altered the trajectory of Earth’s natural health and evolution through anthropogenic climate change, and it has imbalanced the entangled relationships humans have with other species [11]. Harvie explains that this is because our economic systems, with their creedal faith in technocratic development, have yet to find ways of operating in



harmony with the model of production, life, death, and return that makes natural life sustainable in a healthy ecosystem (LS 22) [12].

In LS, Pope Francis argues that the deification of economic practice has proved fruitless because it is never neutral: “Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others (LS 23). “The nurturing of healthy relationships is the antidote to a throwaway culture” [13, 48].

Gerard Mannion emphasizes Francis’s strong words against the prevailing political and economic ideas and practices of contemporary times [14]. The Pope writes,

“As long as production is increased, little concern is given to whether it is at the cost of future resources or the health of the environment; as long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution. In a word, businesses profit by calculating and paying only a fraction of the costs involved”
(LS 195)

According to Daniel J Misleh, Daniel R DiLeo, and Laura Anderko, there is a delicate balance between the health of the Earth and the health of humans. Humans are part of the Earth’s ecosystem. Therefore, environmental degradation, even the ecological crisis is very dangerous for human life and dignity, especially for the poor, vulnerable, and future generations. These hazards include human health and the environment [15].

The ecological crisis is a form of Earth’s unhealthy. This is marked by several

symptoms that Pope Francis calls visible in various realities, namely pollution and climate change (LS 206), availability of clean water (LS 27-31), loss of biodiversity (LS 32-36), the decline in the quality of human life (LS 43-47), destruction of society and global inequality (LS 48-52).

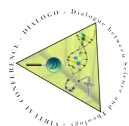
The various realities that befell Earth and humans are caused by “the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of humans and their activities in the world” (LS 101); however, it “has not been accompanied by human development in terms of responsibilities, values, and conscience” (LS 105). There is a danger, “human freedom fades when it surrenders to the blind forces of unconscious impulses, immediate needs, selfishness, and violence” (LS 105).

IV. ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION FOR THE HEALTH OF THE EARTH AND HUMANS

LS 2 teaches that the ecological crisis is caused by “the violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin.” It is also “reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and all forms of life. This is why the Earth, burdened and laid waste is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor”.

Therefore, an ecological conversion is needed to restore the health of the Earth and humans. The idea of ecological conversion is not a concept original to Pope Francis. The Pope calls attention to his predecessor, John Paul ii, who had used the term in 2001, “. . . encourage and support the ecological conversion which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading” [16].

The teachings on ecological conversion in LS can be summarized as follows. Ecological conversion is an “urgent need for a radical change in human behavior”



due to “the influence of industrial civilization” (LS 5) and “the sin of perverted anthropocentrism” (LS 118, 119, 122), the causes of ecological disasters. Ecological conversion “has consequences for the way we think, feel, and live” based on “a motivation born of spirituality, to cultivate a spirit of preserving the world” (LS 216). The ecological crisis “demands a deep inner repentance” from an attitude of “considering the environment” (LS 217).

The teaching of ecological conversion is aimed at two communities, namely the Christian community and the community in general [17]. For Christians, ecological conversion is the “fruit of the encounter with Jesus Christ” that bears fruit “in relation to the world. Living the call to protect God’s work is an essential part of a godly life, not an optional or secondary aspect of the Christian experience” (LS 217). “All Christians” must “clearly express this dimension of their conversion, allowing the power and light of the grace received to extend also to their relationships with other beings and the world around them” (LS 221).

For the human community in general, ecological repentance means establishing a “healthy relationship with the created world” while “admitting guilt, sin, crime or negligence, and repenting with all your heart, changing from the bottom of your heart” (LS 218). Ecological conversion is carried out “individually” and “communally” because “ecological conversion creates a dynamism of continuous change” and “is a communal conversion” (LS 219).

According to Tavernier & Ndubueze, ecological conversion postulates that everyone should rethink the excessive lifestyles of the Anthropocene era in order to care for the Earth and sustain life together. The condition is to build a commitment so that the possibility of ecological disasters does not get worse

because of the human lifestyle, natural consumption, and exploitation of Earth’s natural resources as “excessive” and “sloppy” to the detriment of the Earth and all creation [18].

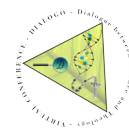
Ecological conversion includes an attitude “which together fosters a generous and gentle spirit of protection” towards the environment (LS 220). Thus, ecological conversion is marked by gratitude and selfless generosity; loving awareness in beautiful universal communion; enthusiasm and creativity of dedicating life to God; and awakens noble brotherhood with all creation. Ecological conversion goes beyond excessive anthropocentrism and gives beauty to life with a loving awareness that connects all created beings [19].

Why does caring for the Earth for its health and human health require an ecological conversion? In LS 66, Pope Francis argues, “This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.”

At the beginning of the LS, Pope Francis quoted the opinion of Patriarch Bartholomew. Pope Francis agrees with Patriarch Bartholomew’s statement that human actions destroy the biological diversity of creation; which reduces the integrity of the earth by causing climate change, which strips the soil of its natural forests or destroys its wetlands; that pollutes the waters of the earth, its soil, its air, and its life - all of these are sins. Crimes against nature are sins against man and against God (LS 8).

This is the basic reason that humans must make an ecological conversion. What is the ecological conversion as far as Pope Francis meant in the LS?

Ecological conversion means admitting



guilt, sin, crime, or omission, repenting wholeheartedly, changing from the bottom of the heart, and reconciling with the created world. Ecological conversion is individual and communal for sustainable change. Ecological conversion is characterized by four attitudes.

First, gratitude and selfless generosity. *Second*, loving awareness in beautiful universal communion. *Third*, enthusiasm and creativity to offer life to God. *Fourth*, to awaken noble brotherhood with all creation (LS 216-221) [20].

According to Pope Francis, human life is based on three fundamental and closely interrelated relationships: with God, with others, and with the Earth itself. The Bible teaches that these three important relationships have been broken, both externally and internally. This destruction is a sin. The harmony between the Creator, mankind, and creation as a whole is disturbed by the assumption that we take God's place and refuse to acknowledge our limitations as creatures. This in turn distorts our mandate to "rule" over the Earth (cf. Gen. 1:28), to "cultivate and care for it" (Gen. 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between man and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen. 3:17-19) (LS 67).

In other words, the sin of human pride allows us to live in an ethic of selfishness that deviates from the relational way that God created and called humans to live. This ethic, Pope Francis says, blinds humanity to the interconnectedness of all creation and leads to actions and systems - economic, political, scientific, and technological - that exploitatively dominate creation rather than living in harmony with it.

In this perspective, LS provides strong insights that can inspire our services to care more about creation. Health care from a theological perspective is based on a deep awareness of interrelationships

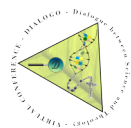
that inspires an ethic of caring. According to Pope Francis, when people are inspired by a deep sense of awe and wonder about the world, they are instinctively moved to take care of the gift of God's good creation. Along with that, concern for others and the universe also grows, develops, and bears fruit in caring for the health of the Earth and humans [21].

Inspired by awe for the creation and equipped with a framework of charity and justice, our services can help humanity restore relationships with God, each other, and all of creation. Thus, cooperation is needed to take care of the health of the Earth, our common home, and better human health. Since the ecological crisis is a reflection of sin, for its treatment and recovery - thus also for the health of the Earth and people - a concerted effort is needed to make an ecological conversion. It can be realized in the context of caring for the health of the Earth and people as a holistic approach that is closely related to Pope Francis's concept of "integral ecology" (LS 10, 11, 62, 124, 137, 159, 225, 230) [22].

Ecological conversion is essential for creating a healthy relationship with creation. Pope Francis confirms this by writing, "A healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults, and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change" (LS 218).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are conclusions and recommendations that can be proposed for the care of the Earth for the sake of its health and human health. Regarding the health of the Earth and people, an integral ecological-based conversion can be realized through the movement of health



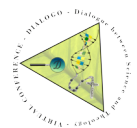
care professionals. They can be at the forefront of helping improve the health of the Earth and people by reducing or even stopping the causes of ecological problems according to their profession. They can revise hospital and system policies and procedures to improve sustainability and reduce carbon footprints.

For all of us, many acts of ecological conversion for the health of the Earth and people can be realized. *First*, we can advocate for supporting environmentally sound public policies, including reducing or eliminating the use of persistent bio-accumulative toxins, carcinogens, or other harmful chemicals that pollute the Earth and can cause various diseases. *Second*, increasing the use of energy and materials that are sustainable, energy-efficient, and renewable. *Third*, develop an environmentally friendly movement to reduce the adverse health impacts of climate change. *Fourth*, choose healthy foods, and support local economies and agricultural practices that reduce harm to humans and the environment. *Fifth*, buying environmentally safe products and technologies reduces waste and pollution and increases the availability of green space.

All of that can be a solution strategy with an integrated approach to restore the health of the Earth and humans. In that way, we respect the dignity of those who are marginalized, prioritize the next generation, and at the same time protect nature.

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