

FR. JOSHTROM ISAAC KUREETHADAM SDB
Salesian Pontifical University, Rome

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN *LAUDATO SI'*

Laudato Si', Pope Francis' encyclical letter on care for our common home, has been widely hailed as a ground-breaking document. In the encyclical, Pope Francis urges the Catholic Church, the Christian communities around the world, followers of other religious tradition, and all people of good will, to earnestly begin to care for our common home that is beginning to crumble. One of the significant contributions of the encyclical is Pope Francis' invitation for education towards ecological citizenship. According to the Pope, the care of our imperilled common planetary home calls for a profound change of our lifestyles. He writes: "A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal". (201)¹ The Pope proposes education towards ecological citizenship to bring about such a renewal and live more responsibly in our common home.

In this paper, we shall discuss about education towards ecological citizenship in *Laudato Si'*. In the encyclical, Pope Francis calls for a rethinking on environmental education to create a new covenant between humanity and the natural world. Ecological education should include a radical critique of the dominant cultural paradigms guiding our contemporary society, namely, rampant individualism and a mechanistic vision of the natural world. We need a holistic education that can re-establish harmony with nature, our fellow human beings and the Transcendent. The Pope also speaks of the variety of settings for ecological education: schools, families, media, catechesis, houses of religious formation, etc. We will conclude with a note on the importance of education for ecological citizenship in this crucial moment of planetary emergency.

1. THE CHALLENGE OF NEW LIFESTYLES AGAINST RAMPANT CONSUMERISM

Pope Francis states in the encyclical that "the precarious state of our common home requires that we be courageous to choose lifestyles which are "countercultural".

¹ The numbers in brackets throughout the paper refer to the paragraph numbers of Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*.

(108) Given the gravity of the crisis, simple solutions like a bit of recycling or occasional bicycling will not do. As Mark Dowd writes: “We should not fool ourselves into thinking that ‘deckchair-rearranging’ activities such as giving up plastic bags and changing light bulbs will be enough to put the tanker that is environmental degradation off course”². We need nothing short of radically new lifestyles if we are to save our common planetary home for ourselves and for future generations.

In order to save our common home, will need to overcome especially our addiction to profligate consumption, so widespread in economically advanced societies and spreading like wildfire to the rest of the world with the globalization of the current neo-liberal economic model. Such lifestyles of excessive consumption, especially on the part of the rich and affluent sections of society, are depleting the natural resources of our common household. As the Pope notes in the encyclical, we are the victims of compulsive consumerism which is also a principal source of anxiety for the post-modern humanity. We quote him:

Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending. Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals. ... This paradigm leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume. But those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power. Amid this confusion, postmodern humanity has not yet achieved a new self-awareness capable of offering guidance and direction, and this lack of identity is a source of anxiety. (203)

Our levels of rapacious consumption are indeed pillaging our common planetary home. The consumption of many important natural resources is clearly beyond their renewal capacity rates. In the case of important natural sources like fisheries, forests, biodiversity, and especially fresh water, we are fast approaching crucial thresholds. In the epoch of the Holocene and during most of the last 6,000 years since civilization began we have lived on the sustainable yield of the Earth’s natural systems. But in recent decades, it appears that we are overshooting the capacity of our home planet’s natural resources that sustain us. It is evident in the popular and widely used mechanism of the Ecological Footprint Analysis (EFA). The ecological footprint is an indicator of human pressure on the physical world in terms of humanity’s consumption of natural resources, use of ecological services and creation of pollution and waste. The ecological footprint analysis clearly shows a consistent trend of over consumption. Currently, humanity as a whole consumes or rather over-consumes 1.5 planets a year and the situation is projected to get even worse in the future looking at current levels of consumption and waste³.

Today, our unbridled consumption patterns have reached frenzied levels against all levels of sustainability. At the same time, we are subtly coaxed to consume ever more by media advertising - the poster boy of modern consumerism. Global

² M. Dowd, *For Every Living Creature on Earth*, The Tablet (13 June 2015), p. 4.

³ See in this regard Global Footprint Network, et al., *Living Planet Report 2014: Species and Spaces, People and Places* (Gland: WWF, 2014), p. 9.

advertising expenditures hit \$643 billion in 2008 as per data available, and in countries like China and India they are growing at 10 percent or more per year⁴. Like a tsunami, consumerism is engulfing human cultures and Earth's ecosystems. The modern consumerist lifestyle of the developed world, increasingly aspired to by the burgeoning upper and middle class populations in developing countries, is a profligately wasteful one. The sheer quantity of waste produced by modern economy and our consumerist life styles is striking. As Pope Francis points out in *Laudato Si'*, if we do not intervene, "the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market". (215)

The rapid depletion of our home planet's natural resources in blissful ignorance of the larger ecological context is a sure recipe for global disaster. As Seán McDonagh notes: "the Earth's ledger, which in the final analysis is the only real one, tells us that the Earth is finite and vulnerable, and that natural systems will be seriously depleted and possibly collapse unless human beings begin to shape their lives in the light of this reality of ecological accounting"⁵. No previous generation has survived the ongoing destruction of its natural supports. Nor will ours. Instead, we go on liquidating our home planet's finite natural assets to fuel our reckless consumption. The global picture in this regard is a matter of grave concern.

As Pope Francis points out in the encyclical, citing his predecessor John Paul II, such a global situation can in turn become "a seedbed for collective selfishness"⁶. (204) The roots of greedy consumption and profligate waste can be found in modern anthropocentrism and widespread individualism. In a totally self-centred vision of reality, any consideration of the planet's sustainable limits or of the common good is seen as irrelevant. Overconsumption on the part of the rich elite minority it can lead to social unrest and violence given the limited availability of resources on a finite planet. We may cite here Pope Francis attentive diagnosis of the roots of our reckless consumption patterns:

When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. As these attitudes become more widespread, social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs. So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (204)

⁴ See E. Assadourian, *The Rise and Fall of Consumer Cultures*, in: The World Watch Institute, *State of the World 2010: Transforming Cultures. From Consumerism to Sustainability*, W.W. Norton, New York – London 2010, p. 11.

⁵ S. McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1986, p. 45.

⁶ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation". *Message for the World Day of Peace* (1 January 1990), no. 1.

Against such unhealthy consumption patterns that tear down the physical and social pillars of our common home, Pope Francis calls for a radical “change in lifestyle” which “could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power”. (206) He recalls in this regard examples of consumers movements who boycotted certain products which forced businesses “to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production”. (206) According to the Pope there is “great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers”. (206) Pope Francis recalls an important affirmation of Pope Benedict: “Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act”⁷. He concludes, citing again Pope Benedict in this regard, that today “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle”⁸. (206) Such a radical change of lifestyle is indeed a tall order but indispensable to care for our planetary home and for our less fortunate brothers and sisters. Pope Francis writes:

Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society. (208)

How can we overcome individualism and develop a different lifestyle in order to bring about significant changes in society and save our common planetary home? In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis suggests that education has a vital role to play in this important task. It is to the role of education in ushering in a radically new and harmonious relationship with our common home that we turn to now.

2. RETHINKING ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR A NEW COVENANT WITH OUR PLANETARY HOME

According to Pope Francis, in the context of the imminent collapse of our common home and the increasing breakdown of social relationships, “we are faced with an educational challenge”. (209) Education is the path on which to accompany all, especially young people, to become responsible stewards of our common home. Pope Francis writes with hope regarding the young generations and the educational challenge they face. In this critical moment of planetary civilization, the silver lining in the clouds is that young people are increasingly becoming real protagonists of efforts to protect and preserve our common planetary home. However, as they live in an ambient of excessive consumerism they need to be helped to cultivate more sustainable lifestyles. The Pope writes:

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter “Caritas in Veritate”* (29 June 2009), no. 66.

⁸ Benedict XVI, “*If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*”. *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace* (1 January 2010), no. 11.

In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. (209)

Young people are most vulnerable to the contemporary consumerist culture, but they can also be guided to make responsible ecological choices in terms of life-styles. We are thus faced with a challenge as well as an opportunity in the area of environmental education. Pope Francis notes how "environmental education has broadened its goals". (210) He refers to some of the new trends in environmental education: "Whereas in the beginning it was mainly centred on scientific information, consciousness-raising and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of the "myths" of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)". (210)

The deeper sources of the utilitarian mindset characterized by individualism and consumerism are modern anthropocentrism and the mechanistic vision of the natural world. Significantly, Pope Francis identifies these in the third chapter of the encyclical as the underlying human roots of the ecological crisis. Anthropocentrism has led to the exaltation of individualism while the mechanistic perception of the natural world as a mere storehouse of resources has led to rampant consumerism which is the trademark of free market economy. It is worthwhile to reflect on them briefly in the context of ecological education.

As noted educationists like C.A. Bowers, David Orr, and others have pointed out, most of our current educational systems are based on these presuppositions inherited from Modernity, anthropocentrism and the mechanistic conception of nature, in particular. Modern anthropocentrism subtly permeates educational curricula in most parts of the world⁹. According to Bowers, the main cultural message propagated by the contemporary educational system is the western myth that accords human beings the status of independence and absolute centrality in relation to other forms of life within biotic communities. He writes: "In all public education students encounter in textbooks an image of the individual as an autonomous agent engaged in social and technological activities. The pronoun 'you' is ubiquitous from grade one through grade twelve"¹⁰. The greater part of the school and university curricula continue to suggest somewhat disingenuously that human beings are the one and only point of reference for all that exists in the world. The problem with modern education is that the autonomy of the self is seen as the perfect ideal and is given a central role within the conceptual basis of the educational curriculum. Modern and contemporary forms of educational theories and

⁹ C.A. Bowers provides an excellent review of how anthropocentrism subtly permeates educational curricula as in the case of school text-books. See C.A. Bowers, *Education, Cultural Myths and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes*, State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y. 1993, p. 117-153.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 125.

praxis are largely centred around the atomistic and reductive concept of the self, inherited from Modernity.

Modern educational curricula also continue to transmit the mechanistic conception of the natural world inherited from Modernity and indirectly subserve the instrumental rationality of modern industrial economy. In most textbooks Earth is represented more as a source of natural resources for human consumption rather than a home that hosts and sustains humanity along with myriads of others forms of life. The educational curricula and system mostly continue to work within a *Weltbild* or framework of unlimited economic expansion based on the myth of the infinite plenitude of natural resources and people as consumers¹¹. Some of the top-notch centres of higher education continue to spawn engineers, technicians and managers who measure their career success in terms of increased economic output, even at the cost of the wellbeing of the planet, and profit margins, even when it means depletion of the life-sustaining resources of our home planet and our common ecosystems. As David W. Orr points out the ecological crisis is not caused mainly by ignorant people, but by those who are literate (people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs and PhDs), some of the best educated people in society¹².

According to Orr, the main focus of current educational curricula appears only to prepare the students to compete in the world economy as economic growth is presented as the highest goal¹³. Such an outlook also promotes the *mantra* of technological mastery of the planet rather than the creed of sustainable living on Earth. Significantly, even programmes of “environmental” education in the educational curricula work within the mechanistic outlook of the natural world and the dream of the technological mastery of the planet and its resources. The underlying assumption of most environmental education curricula is that a bit of recycling, organic farming, occasional use of renewable forms of energy, etc. is all that it takes to ward off the ecological crisis, without having to fundamentally question our current mind-set and radically alter profligate consumerist life styles. As John Hilcoat and Eureka Janse van Rensburg point out there exists a conspicuous “silence about malconsumption in environmental education”¹⁴.

According to Pope Francis, the new ecological culture needed to care for our common home “cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and practical responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources”. (111) The changes required are much wider and far-reaching. “We need to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments

¹¹ See *ibidem*, p. 3, 127-30.

¹² See D.W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect*, Island Press, Washington, DC 1994, p. 7. Orr makes a thoughtful comparison, taking cue from Elie Wiesel, between the ecological crisis and the Holocaust of which the designers and perpetrators were the heirs of Kant and Goethe, widely thought to be the best educated people on earth. See *ibidem*, p. 7, 18-20.

¹³ See *ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁴ J. Hilcoat, E. Janse van Rensburg, *Consuming Passions: Educating the Empty Self*, Australian Journal of Environmental Education 30(2014)1, p. 88.

of recent centuries". (121) "We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge". (141) What is required is a new vision of reality, a new way of conceiving our relationship with our common home. Technical remedies will not do.

There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system. (111)

The ultimate aim of all ecological education should be "bring about deep change" as "certain mindsets do influence our behavior". (215) According to Pope Francis, "our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature". (215) We stand in need of a holistic approach towards education for the care of our common home and our common household.

3. A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis proposes a holistic model of ecological education, capable of re-establishing harmony with nature, with others and with God. He writes: "It [ecological education] seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God". (210)

It is important to reflect on the holistic model of education proposed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, which is also in line with the integral ecology of the encyclical. Holistic education, according to the Pope, should lead to a peaceful coexistence with the natural world, our fellow human beings, and ultimately our very Creator. Let us go on to reflect briefly on each of these constitutive dimensions of ecological education.

Ecological education should help, first of all, to re-establish an intimate link with the natural world, our common home. Unfortunately, educational training imparted in schools and universities often continue to promote a relationship of dualistic divide between humanity and the rest of the natural world. Such a dualistic divide is rooted in the epistemological separation of the self and object inherited from Modernity. Bowers points out how most textbooks perpetuate such a dualistic epistemology.

The preposition "on" ("The Earth You Live on" in the chapter heading) expresses the form of relationship that is consistent with the verb to "see" as the way of knowing about relationships. This reference to vision, which involves a viewer relationship, where the "outside" world is seen as a picture, further strengthens the sense of self as separate and self-contained¹⁵.

¹⁵ C.A. Bowers, *Education, Cultural Myths and the Ecological Crisis*, p. 126.

The educational curricula thus further reinforce the modern worldview that humans are totally separate from the natural world and are not dependent on the web of biological and ecosystems that sustain all life, including human life, on Earth. As F. Berkes and others have noted, our alienation from nature is a key component of environmental destruction¹⁶. Education towards sustainability requires a radical correction of such a “persistent and problematic ‘human versus nature’ binary”¹⁷, if we are to overcome our current ecological hazards¹⁸. A holistic educational curricula educates students to become responsible members of the wider human community and citizens of the biotic community. As the Pope writes: “there is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in life-style”. (211) Ecological education entails simple and concrete measures of caring for the natural world which is our common home. Again Pope Francis writes in the encyclical:

Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. (211)

Secondly, holistic ecological education should also lead to a greater sense of solidarity within the human family, especially with the more vulnerable members of our common household. To quote Pope Francis: “It [ecological education] needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care”. (210)

The contemporary ecological crisis points not only to the unsustainable physical state of our planetary home but also of our common household. Centuries of colonization and the unbridled reign of neo-liberal capitalism in the last few decades have led to the ruthless domination and rampant exploitation of ecosystems and human communities around the world. Education towards sustainability needs to inculcate precisely the virtues of kindness and solidarity in the young pupils if we are to construct a more equal and just world. The current educational scenario appears to be largely guided by the neo-liberal agenda of free market which is taking its toll on human communities and ecosystems. Against such a situation we need to create a civilization of love and kindness, performing those small daily acts of solidarity, in a world where power and wealth tend to dominate

¹⁶ See F. Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*, Taylor & Francis, Philadelphia 1999.

¹⁷ G. Di Chiro, *Response: Reengaging Environmental Education in the Anthropocene*, Australian Journal of Environmental Education 30(2014)1, p. 17.

¹⁸ See in this regard A. Cachelin, J. Rose, D. Dustin, *Sustainability in Outdoor Education: Rethinking Root Metaphors*, Journal of Sustainability Education 2(2011). See also W. Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, W. Norton & Company, New York 1996.

and monopolize¹⁹. Solidarity can be a perfect antidote for neo-liberal economic imperialism which is ravaging our home planet. Compassion and solidarity are indeed vital for the future of our planetary home and our common household.

Thirdly, holistic ecological education “should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning” (210), as Pope Francis points out in the encyclical. Education is complete only when it succeeds in inculcating a profound sense of the awareness of the presence of God in the natural world and in the lives of people.

As we have noted in our third green commandment about the theological vision of *Laudato Si'*, the contemporary ecological crisis points to the forgetfulness of the deeper truth, namely, that the physical world is above all God's creation, and is permeated with the divine presence. The ecological crisis is, in fact, symptomatic of a deeper spiritual and religious crisis²⁰. The unsustainable situation of our common home, and of our common household, is ultimately caused by a profound rupture in our relationship with the Creator, the ground of all being, who has brought the entire material universe into existence and lovingly sustains it along with all forms of life. Humanity cannot expect to live in harmony with creation, if they are not at peace with the very Creator. Pope Benedict XVI offers a very poignant reflection in this regard:

The brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property ... The waste of creation begins where we no longer recognize any claim beyond ourselves, seeing only ourselves²¹.

The ecological crisis reveals how the gods of secular reason, technological prowess and economic profit have displaced faith in a divine Creator and sacred respect for the order of creation. As Michael S. Northcott writes: “the excess greenhouse gases produced by industrial capitalism are the fruits of the modern devotion to the gods of secular reason, technological power and monetary accumulation, and the sidelining of traditional understandings of community, justice and the sacred”²². The ecological crisis arises precisely from our inability to perceive the physical world as God's creation, to respect its integrity, and to appreciate its intrinsic goodness and beauty, beyond mere considerations of utility and consumption. Education towards sustainability needs to be anchored in a profound religious sense of God's goodness and His loving presence in the natural world and in human history.

¹⁹ See Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”* (24 November 2013), no. 188.

²⁰ See A. Cohen-Kiener, *Claiming Earth as A Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis through the Lens of Faith*, Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont 2009, p. 2; D. Bookless, *Planet Wise: Dare to Care for God's World*, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham 2008, p. 41.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone* (6 August 2008).

²² M. S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, Darton, Longman, and Todd/Christian Aid, London 2007, p. 14.

Laudato Si' points to the direction of ecological education today as re-establishing harmony with the natural world, fellow human beings and the Creator. Such a holistic approach towards education is vital for the protection of our common planetary home in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis.

4. SETTINGS FOR ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In the encyclical, Pope Francis speaks of a variety of settings for ecological education: schools, families, media, catechesis, houses of religious formation, etc. He insists on imparting such education right from an early age. As he writes: "Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life". (213) Ecological education therefore should cover the entire spectrum of our lives.

Pope Francis lays special emphasis on the role of the family in the arena of ecological education. He points out that the womb of the family is where one receives integral education. Here are some beautiful reflections from Pope Francis in this regard:

I would stress the great importance of the family, which is "the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life"²³. In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say "thank you" as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings. (213)

According to Pope Francis, "political institutions and various other social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people's awareness" (214) about the need to care for and protect our common planetary home. The Pope proposes, given the importance of the question, that political institutions be "empowered to impose penalties for damage inflicted on the environment". (214) He is aware that these measures are not sufficient in themselves. Ultimately "we also need the personal qualities of self-control and willingness to learn from one another". (214)

Pope Francis points to the importance of educating towards the responsible stewardship of creation within the Catholic Church and in all Christian communities. He writes: "All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education". (214). As for the Catholic Church, the call for ecological education on the part of Pope Francis is clear and will challenge all its members. We may cite from the editorial of "The Tablet" in the wake of the publication of *Laudato Si'*:

²³ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter "Centesimus Annus"* (1 May 1991), no. 39.

How will the universal Church respond to this timely, resounding act of papal leadership, which touches life at every level, from turning off light switches and recycling paper, to major decisions regarding international investment, lobbying politicians and deciding how to vote? Local and national Churches will need to look to their lifestyles, bishops to their conference agendas, priests to their weekly preaching, schools to their textbooks, families to how they spend and what they enjoy²⁴.

Significantly, the Pope makes explicit the paramount role of seminaries and houses of formation in ecological education, the very first Papal statement ever to do so²⁵. It needs to be acknowledged that ecological questions do not receive the due attention in the formation of clergy and religious leaders around the world with detrimental consequences in their pastoral ministry when it comes to the question of the stewardship of creation. A 2014 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion stated: "Most Americans who attend religious services at least once or twice a month hear little from their clergy about the issue of climate change. Just over one-third of Americans say their clergy leader speaks about climate change often (11%) or sometimes (25%). More than 6-in-10 Americans say their clergy leader rarely (29%) or never (33%) references climate change"²⁶. These findings appear to hold good for clergy and religious in almost every other country or region in the world. Against this background, Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'* in the context of ecological education:

It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. (214)

Widening the scope of ecological education, Pope Francis speaks of the importance of aesthetic education, quoting Pope John Paul II: "the relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked"²⁷. Pope Francis observes with keen insight: "If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple". (215) According to him, "by learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism". (215) We may recall in this regard the oft quoted saying of Fëdor Dostoevskij that "only beauty will save the world". We need to educate ourselves to appreciate the beauty of the natural world around us, if we are to save it for ourselves and for future generations to come.

²⁴ Editorial: *Laudato Si': World's Eyes are Opened to Creation*, The Tablet (20 June 2015), p. 2.

²⁵ See Y. Neril, J. Auciello, *Report on Faith and Ecology Courses in North American Seminaries*, The Interfaith Centre for Sustainable Development, Jerusalem 2015, p. 3.

²⁶ R. P. Jones, D. Cox, J. Navarro-Rivera, *Believers, Sympathizers, & Skeptics: Why Americans are Conflicted about Climate Change, Environmental Policy, and Science. Findings from the PRRI/AAR Religion, Values, and Climate Change Survey*, Public Religion Research Institute, Washington, DC 2014, p. 4.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, no. 14.

Pope Francis encourages us in the encyclical to make our small but precious contribution in the concrete settings of our lives towards the safeguarding of our common home. He writes in the context of ecological education:

We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile. (212)

5. IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

The contemporary ecological crisis places humanity at crossroads with regard to its own future in our common home, Earth. The coming years will be crucial as we have precious little time left to pool together our resources and energies to protect and heal our common planetary home. Education towards sustainability is indeed one of the most urgent needs of our times. As Stephen Mulkey warns:

It is likely that we have only about a decade to take sustainability seriously or we will lose the window of opportunity to salvage a livable planet for our children and grandchildren. Humanity faces a central choice: Live more sustainably on this planet, or face consequences that are incompatible with civilization. The choice really is that stark²⁸.

Sustainability has certainly become a greater concern in the educational arena today. Education for sustainable development has moved from the periphery to a core component of quality education and has stimulated new approaches to pedagogy²⁹. However, the currently alarming state of our home planet is conspicuous evidence that we are far from living sustainably on Earth and that we have indeed a long way to go in this regard. Education itself, as Prithi Nambiar writes in the editorial of the “Journal of Education for Sustainable Development”, “is yet to be seen as the most powerful agent of sustainability”³⁰. Education towards sustainability is still largely stuck and moulded within the old environmental paradigm, and continues to be still considered “supplementary education”, a sort of an appendix, and as such incapable of leading to a more sustainable society³¹. A recent report on education to sustainability in higher centres of learning bluntly admits:

²⁸ S. Mulkey, *Sustainability Science as a Foundation for Higher Education in the Environmental Century*, Sustainability (December 2012), DOI: 10.1089/sus.2012.9918.

²⁹ See Ch. Hopkins, *Scope and Impact of Global Actions under UNDESD*, Journal of Education for Sustainable Development 8(2014), p. 113-19. For a review of the United Nations *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* see also: F. Lenglet, *Can ESD Reach the Year 2020?*, Journal of Education for Sustainable Development 8(2014), p. 121-25; D. Tilbury, *Are We Learning to Change? Mapping Global Progress in Education for Sustainable Development in the Lead Up to ‘Rio Plus 20’*, Global Environmental Research 14(2010), p. 102.

³⁰ P. Nambiar, *Developing Learning Opportunities for Sustainability*, Journal of Education for Sustainable Development 8(2014), p. 87.

³¹ See S. Strife, *Reflecting on Environmental Education: Where Is Our Place in the Green Movement*, The Journal of Environmental Education 41(2010), p. 179-80.

... the global higher education system as a whole remains maladapted to the conditions that we face ... ever since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, education has been held to be a key agent of change throughout a series of high-level agreements and declarations ... but it remains largely part of the problem³².

Significantly, one of the earliest responses to *Laudato Si'* was the signing of a statement on the part of leaders in Catholic higher education, including nearly a hundred University Presidents from the United States alone, and others occupying significant posts in academic institutions around the world. The Statement of Leaders in Catholic Higher Education Globally praises the encyclical as a "timely, comprehensive, and inspiring" text and welcomes its "urgent call to action to address the climate and justice crises threatening the planet"³³. It also thanks Pope Francis "for his strong and courageous leadership in addressing the interrelated crises and ways of life threatening Earth in our times"³⁴. We may cite a few paragraphs from the Preamble to the above Statement, particularly relevant to the theme of ecological education.

Higher educational institutions globally must seek to provide influential leadership in discovering new and life-giving paths to address the pressing emergencies of climate change, social exclusion, and extreme poverty and in uncovering new paths to achieving peace, justice and environmental sustainability for the whole human family and the entire family of creation.

We commit ourselves as leaders in Catholic Higher Education to work together regionally and globally, through all the means available to and appropriate for our colleges and universities as institutions of higher learning, to study, promote, and act on the deals and vision of integral ecology laid out by Pope Francis.

More specifically, we commit ourselves as leaders in Catholic Higher Education globally to integrate care for the planet, integral human development, and concern for the poor within our research projects, our educational curricula and public programming, our institutional infrastructures, policies and practices, and our political and social involvements as colleges and universities³⁵.

It is heartening to realize that Pope Francis' call for ecological education in *Laudato Si'* is receiving such enthusiastic and high level endorsements like the one we have just quoted above. We cannot but augur more such responses from academic centres, churches and religions, and the wider civil society around the world in the area of ecological education. In the care of our increasingly imperilled common home, the role of education is indeed vital and indispensable. Educators of young people around the world will be challenged in the years to come not only to draw up appropriate syl-

³² *The Sustainable University: Progress and Prospects*, eds. S. Sterling, L. Maxey, H. Luna, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Abingdon, Oxon – New York 2012, p. xxii.

³³ *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Statement of Leaders in Catholic Higher Education Globally*. For the statement and list of signatories see: <http://ignatiansolidarity.net/catholic-higher-ed-encyclical-sign-on/>.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

labi to impart a holistic curricula of ecological education but also to revolutionize the entire educational process itself in order to care more responsibly for our common home. Educating towards ecological citizenship is indeed the need of the hour.

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN *LAUDATO SI'*

Summary

Laudato Si', Pope Francis' recent encyclical on care for our common home, reminds us that ecological education is vital to becoming more responsible stewards of our home planet. In the face of the contemporary ecological crisis, we stand in need of a deep personal transformation and a radical renewal of our life-styles. Here the role of education is paramount. Pope Francis calls for an ecological education capable of establishing a new covenant between humanity and the natural world. According to the Pope, we need a holistic education that can re-establish harmony with nature, our fellow human beings and the Transcendent. The Pope also speaks of the variety of settings for education to ecological citizenship: schools, families, media, catechesis, houses of religious formation, etc. Education towards ecological citizenship is the need of the hour in this crucial moment of planetary emergency.

Keywords: ecological education, ecological crisis, ecological citizenship, stewardship, *Laudato Si'*

Note about the Author: Fr. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam SDB is Chair of Philosophy of Sciences at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome and Director of the Institute of Social and Political Sciences. His fields of scientific interest include: cosmology, ecology, environmental philosophy, ecological education, and creation theology.

EDUKACJA EKOLOGICZNA W *LAUDATO SI'*

Abstrakt

Wydana ostatnio encyklika papieża Franciszka *Laudato si'* poświęcona trosce o wspólny dom ludzkości, przypomina, że edukacja ekologiczna jest kluczową sprawą, aby ludzie stali się odpowiedzialnymi włodarzami planety. W obliczu współczesnego kryzysu ekologicznego, zauważa się potrzebę głębokiej osobistej przemiany i radykalnego odnowienia stylu życia. Tutaj rola edukacji jest nieoceniona. Papież Franciszek wzywa do edukacji ekologicznej zdolnej ustanowić nowe przymierze między ludzkością a światem natury. Według Papieża, człowiek potrzebuje holistycznej edukacji, która może przywrócić harmonię z naturą, z bliźnimi i z Transcendencją. Papież mówi także o całej gamie środowisk, w których wychowuje się do ekologicznego obywatelstwa: szkoły, rodziny, media, katecheza, domy formacji religijnej itp. Edukacja w kierunku ekologicznego obywatelstwa jest potrzebą chwili w tym kluczowym momencie zagrożenia planety.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja ekologiczna, kryzys ekologiczny, ekologiczne obywatelstwo, włodarzowanie, *Laudato Si'*