

## *Laudato Si'* and Ecological Education. Implications for Catholic Education

## *Laudato Si'* y la educación ecológica. Implicaciones para la educación católica

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### Abstract

*In Laudato Si'* Pope Francis has offered a 'position paper' on care for the common good. Chapter Six, 'Ecological Education and Spirituality', is especially relevant for those overseeing the operation of Catholic schools. A deeper understanding of *Laudato Si'* can be gained from comparison with two magisterial documents written by Pope Emeritus: the message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace in 2007 and the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009a, 2009b). Study of the issues raised in these texts offers a broad frame of reference. Using the method of document analysis, our understanding of *Laudato Si'* can be viewed in the context of contemporary magisterial teaching on education. This term now marks a fresh direction in the underlying principles of Catholic education.

**Keywords:** Catholic education, Pope Francis, humanism, ecological education

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## Resumen

Con *Laudato Si'*, el Papa Francisco entrega un 'documento de posición' sobre el cuidado para el bien común. El Capítulo Sexto, 'Educación y espiritualidad ecológica', es especialmente relevante para quienes supervisan el funcionamiento de las escuelas católicas. Puede alcanzarse una comprensión más profunda de *Laudato Si'* comparándola con dos documentos magisteriales escritos por el Papa Emérito: el mensaje para la Jornada Mundial de Oración por la Paz de 2007 y la encíclica *Caritas in Veritate* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009a, 2009b). El estudio de los temas abordados en estos textos ofrece un marco de referencia amplio. Empleando el método de análisis documental, nuestra comprensión de *Laudato Si'* puede verse dentro del contexto de la enseñanza magisterial contemporánea sobre la educación. Este término hoy marca una nueva dirección dentro de los principios subyacentes de la educación católica.

**Palabras clave:** educación católica, Papa Francisco, humanismo, educación ecológica

*Laudato Si'*, the recent encyclical of Pope Francis on the care of creation (2015a), has been the focus of a good degree of favourable comment in the secular and religious press. This is surprising given the often tense relationship between the Church and proponents of much of today's liberal thinking. Writing in the *New York Times*, Paul Vallely, a biographer of Pope Francis, opined that the Pope's trenchant focus on climate change in the encyclical would endear him to liberal opinion across the globe (2015). Stephanie Kirchgaessner of *The Guardian* (a 'progressive' newspaper in the UK) went as far as to call *Laudato Si'* 'a moral call for action on phasing out the use of fossil fuels' (2015). Both examples cited herein are reflective of much wider acclaim for the scope and content of the encyclical from the secular press. This is to be welcomed as an example of dialogue between the Church and the society of which it is part.

The present article does not seek to offer a critique, either explicitly or implicitly, of the encyclical's warnings on climate change and the need for a rethink of global economic policies. It accepts that these issues present significant challenges for the Church's engagement with the world of science and politics (Younger, 2015). Pope Francis has offered the universal Church a wide-ranging 'position paper' on how Catholics in particular, but all of humanity, should care for the planet. In the encyclical, especially in Chapter VI, Pope Francis (2015a) introduces a new term into the lexicon of Catholic education: 'ecological education'. This offers the possibility of a new lens through which the Catholic community can examine afresh the aims and purposes of Catholic education. In so doing, it is first necessary to locate 'ecological education' in the context of the Church's ongoing understanding of its body of educational teaching, while thinking through what this entails for policymakers in the field (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 2009).

The core of this paper is a critical exploration of the relationship between two important concepts: 'integral humanism' and the so-called 'educational emergency'. It aims to identify and explore the contribution of *Laudato Si'* to aspects of Catholic educational thought. There are two key arguments advanced in this paper. First, an apparent failure to grasp the implications of 'integral humanism', a term employed by the philosopher Jacques Maritain (1939) in the middle of the 20th century, is a major contributory factor in the current 'educational emergency' as diagnosed by Pope Benedict. Second, 'ecological education' is Pope Francis' unique contribution as to how we best address the social and cultural implications arising from the 'educational emergency'. In using this term, Pope Francis is offering a refreshed understanding of 'integral humanism' using language more amenable to contemporary educational thought. At the heart of his vision is the traditional image of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2004).

## Method

The study seeks to work within Catholic educational tradition. The established teaching of the Catholic Church provides the key field of activity of the study (Aldrich, 2000). This tradition provides written evidence of continuity and change regarding the ways in which the Church has addressed, successfully or otherwise, a range of social, cultural and educational challenges to its spectrum of educational endeavours (McCulloch, 2004). This body of teaching is set within a broader flux of ideas and movements, which both inform and are informed by Catholic thinking.

Document analysis is employed to critique the evolving aims and purposes of Catholic education as found in the relevant magisterial (or teaching) documents of the Catholic Church. In broad terms, this research method facilitates a search for meaning and thematic connections within and across documents published in different historical and cultural circumstances (Bowen, 2009). This allows us a look at the operation of a dual form of 'discursive practices' in the teaching office of the Church. How is this done? In broad terms, the various bodies involved in the writing of magisterial documents employ standard academic practices (e.g. meetings/roundtables/colloquia) in which possible new directions in educational teaching are debated in the context of established traditions, with particular focus on how previous teachings have been received by the many parties with a stake in Catholic education: schools, educational agencies, and governments (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). Catholic Church teaching on education therefore emerges from a dual process of reflection on a) the Church's own intellectual and educational traditions and b) wider cultural influences in the world of education. In so doing, there arise opportunities for critical engagement with existing bodies of knowledge, as well as the views of those actively involved in teaching (Bowen, 2009).

Furthermore, this is an internal study in the sense that the documents under scrutiny are the written record of a teaching deemed authoritative by those within the Catholic tradition (i.e. from the popes and the Magisterium of the Church), but which are not accepted as authoritative by those who are not part of the Catholic community. Nonetheless, the teaching contained in this body of work informs policymaking in Catholic schools worldwide and, consequently, has varying degrees of impact on the lives of Catholic and other forms of schools across the globe.

In chronological order, the magisterial documents relevant to this study are: *Populorum Progressio* (Pope Paul VI, 1967); *Redemptor Hominis* (Pope John Paul II, 1979); *Centesimus Annus* (Pope John Paul II, 1991); *Message for world day of prayer for peace* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007); *Address to Rome Diocesan Convention* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007); *Caritas in Veritate* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009a), and *Educating to intercultural dialogue in Catholic schools: Living in harmony for a civilisation of love* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). The important texts noted above offer a robust set of interpretive keys to assist the Church's educational community in engaging profitably with the message of *Laudato Si'*.

A chronological arrangement of key documents is useful for tracking the evolution of key concepts and ideas. Alongside this, however, there must be some form of thematic arrangement to open up certain avenues for the researcher through which the principal 'discourse' can be analysed. This arrangement provides some initial clues to what will be developed throughout the article. The question of the 'educational emergency', itself a highly-charged term and crucial to our argument, was introduced into the debate by Pope Benedict in 2007. The question of 'humanism' vis-à-vis the Church's response to the challenges of modernity is outlined in Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967). Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (2009a), following from Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), comments on how a fresh understanding of humanism can energise the Church's mission. In making this comment in a document devoted to social justice, he forms an effective thematic bridge between Pope Paul and the themes of *Laudato Si'*. In addition, it is Pope John Paul II who offers us the term 'human ecology' in *Centesimus Annus* (1991) and Pope Benedict, in turn, comments on this in his *Message for the world day of prayer for peace* (2007).

Document analysis, as used here, offers a wide, but focused lens through which to explore thematic connections across the documents, as we have seen above. It brings out a deeper understanding of the potential of the new term 'ecological education' in the lexicon of Catholic education to become a principal driver of policy in the field.

### **'Integral humanism' and 'educational emergency'**

The failure to integrate the insights of 'integral humanism' into the field of Catholic education has contributed towards what Pope Benedict XVI (2007) has described as a contemporary 'educational emergency'. In this section, I look first at the relationship between 'integral humanism' and education. I then consider the contours of the 'educational emergency'. Finally, I suggest some ways of bringing both ideas together.

## What is understood by integral humanism?

The speech by Pope Francis to the Fifth National Ecclesial Convention of the Catholic Church in Italy was notable for its reference to 'new humanism' in its title *Il nuovo umanesimo in Cristo Gesù* - 'The new humanism in Jesus Christ' (2015b). This call for a 'new humanism' was a contemporary echo of the term 'integral humanism' coined by the philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) in his seminal work *True Humanism* (1939) (this text is also called *Integral Humanism*). The use of this choice of words by Pope Francis serves to bring aspects of the thoughts of Jacques Maritain to the heart of Catholic life once again, although it is not claimed here that Maritain's work is the principal source of 'new humanism' as currently used in Catholic life.

Of course, this debate is framed within the so-called 'Catholic intellectual tradition' – the Church's attempts to use both faith and reason to offer an intellectually coherent vision of humanity's destiny (Schall, 2008). Like many original thinkers in the history of Christianity, Maritain found that his ideas were not always accepted, at least initially, in established Catholic intellectual circles (Joyce, 2000; Mercier, 1944). His support for a new understanding of humanism could easily be interpreted as a move, albeit cautiously expressed, away from the primacy of the spiritual towards the secular. To Louis Mercier, himself a distinguished philosopher, there was an implicit danger in playing around with an established term (humanism) which, by definition was focused on the natural order (1944). Maritain was aware of this line of criticism and addressed the objections to his own ideas succinctly (1939, Introduction). The heart of his thesis is twofold: a) humanism 'tends to render man [sic] more truly human and to make his original greatness manifest' (xiv) and b) Christian humanism would facilitate 'a new Christian order no longer sacred but secular in its forms' (xvi). In *Education at the Crossroads* (1965), a set of lectures given in 1943 at Yale University, Maritain applied his vision of the human person to education. His definition of man (sic) is an anchor point for contemporary articulations of his thought:

In answer to our question, then, 'What is man?' we may give the Greek, Jewish, and Christian idea of man: man as an animal endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is in the intellect; and man as a free individual in personal relation with God [...] (1965, p. 7).

Maritain is digging at what would become a deep intellectual path through Pope Leo XIII's social teaching and, in so doing, preparing the ground for future developments, which would flourish in the work of future popes. We need to ask how recent popes, including Pope Francis, strove to integrate these powerful ideas into the mainstream of Catholic teaching on the dignity of the human person. Some examples follow.

In *Populorum Progressio* – an Encyclical on the Development of Peoples (1967), Pope Paul VI sought a 'new humanism' (20), a 'full-bodied humanism' (42), and a 'true humanism' (42) as opposed to a 'narrow humanism' (42). While a case could be made that he is proposing too many types of humanism without an adequate explanation of how they relate to each other, Pope Paul certainly offered a refreshed understanding of the theology of the Incarnation to underpin the wider dialogue with culture promoted so eagerly by the Second Vatican Council. This openness to engaging with other ways of thinking flows through other important documents, most notably, *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council, 1965a) and *Nostra Aetate* (Second Vatican Council, 1965b).

The Council's Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (Second Vatican Council, 1965c), while avoiding the term 'humanism' in the text, emphasized the role of education in promoting 'the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human' (p. 3). The core of the message is that the human person is incomplete and hence cannot flourish without the anchor of a transcendental vision of what it means to be human. This model of Christian anthropology, rooted in a spiritual reading of Genesis 1-3, is a baseline for the development of specifically Christian philosophies of education (Topping, 2015).

Pope John Paul II's intellectual attachment to Christian humanism in a world which seemed to be leaving religion behind marks him out, according to Joseph de la Torre, as a 'sentinel' for the work of Maritain in late 20th century Catholic intellectual life (2001, p. 204). George Weigel, a biographer of Pope John Paul II, points out that the future pope was introduced to Maritain's work, especially *True Humanism*, as a young scholar and that this text 'later influenced the Second Vatican Council and its

approach to the modern world (Weigel, 1999, p. 139) – it is salutary to recall the important role played by the future Pope John Paul as a *peritus* during the work of the Council. Pope John Paul II's first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (Redeemer of Man), opens as follows: 'The Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history' (1979). The use of upper case letters at the start of the text underlines the centrality of this message to his thinking. Section 11 offers, in effect, a powerful summary of the scope of Christian humanism: 'In Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence.' Indeed, the long pontificate of Pope John Paul II was marked by a scholarly and pastoral determination to set out the contours of a new humanism for the modern age.

More recently, Pope Benedict XVI employed 'integral humanism' as a lens through which to evaluate a broad range of contemporary cultural and educational developments. In a speech to European university professors (2007), he reflected on how 'new humanism' could be integrated into broader Catholic cultural thinking. In linking this proposal to alleged 'social instability' in Europe arising, he argued, from a distinct rejection of traditional religious and cultural values, Benedict returned to the 'question of man' as a means of reassessing these pervasive cultural shifts. Anticipating possible criticism of the use of the term 'new humanism', Benedict explained that there was no place for a 'superficial desire for novelty', while calling for Europe to 'preserve and reappropriate her authentic tradition' if it wished to be a cradle of humanism. In this we see evidence of Benedict's long-expressed and deeply-rooted conviction that Christianity had shaped the civilisation of Europe and made its culture a beacon for humanity (Pope Benedict XVI, 2008). In essence, Benedict sees humanism as the soul of Europe and, crucially, wishes to reclaim it for the modern age.

This line of thinking is further developed in Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009a), where he comments on Pope Paul VI's exploration of 'humanism' in *Populorum Progressio* (Pope Paul VI, 1967). In quick succession, Pope Benedict uses both 'integral humanism' and 'Christian humanism' as drivers of a necessary openness towards others, thus suggesting that, in his mind at least, they were synonymous terms:

A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism. Only a humanism open to the Absolute can guide us in the promotion and building of forms of social and civic life – structures, institutions, culture and ethos – without exposing us to the risk of becoming ensnared by the fashions of the moment (2009a, para. 78).

Of course, we need to ask whether it is possible to align the ideas emanating from the 'new humanism' to the philosophies of education in circulation today. Catholic teaching on education developed rapidly in the decades following the Council. For example, while holding on to the value of traditional catechetical approaches to religious education in the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, 2009), increasing importance was placed on the role of (Catholic) education as a means of wider human development, thus hinting, to a greater or lesser extent, at the influence of 'integral humanism'. The most recent document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013), offered 'integral humanism' as a way of framing and re-presenting to contemporary society the established traditions of family life, community, education, and work (2013, p. 72). This new attempt to develop a humanism for contemporary society is a sign, it claims, of respect for the important contribution all religious traditions can make towards the building of a good society (2013, p. 20). This seems to be a move, albeit cautiously expressed, towards recognition of the value of other religious traditions in the life of Catholic schools. As such, it is a challenge to what could be interpreted as a secular anthropological vision increasingly closed to the transcendent and inimical to a wider religious literacy (Conroy, 2016).

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis goes one stage further in arguing for a humanism which seeks to bring together different fields of knowledge in the service of the human family (2015a, 141). To Pope Francis, the many issues arising from the study of ecosystems, for example, cannot be fully addressed without reference to wider analyses of social interaction, including how individuals relate to themselves and to others (2015a, p. 14).

Pope Francis developed this theme in a speech to a gathering of Church leaders in Italy on November 10, 2015. He identified humanism as a Christocentric mission, which should not be overly abstract and offered some practical examples of what an embrace of 'new humanism' meant for the Church today.



For Pope Francis, humanism means living close to the people and exhibiting the following characteristics: 'popular, humble, generous, and happy' (2015b). The pedagogical approach adopted by Francis is clear: use what could be an abstract concept (such as humanism) and locate it in the daily life and experience of the Christian. While this might come over as simplistic, I suggest that the reality is quite different. Pope Francis has recognized the depth of the challenges faced by the Church in its mission, not least the loss of the grammar of theology and cultural expressions of faith, especially in the medium of popular piety. For Pope Francis, a Christocentric humanism is a necessary supportive layer to 'ecological education' and is an appropriate response to the 'educational emergency' as diagnosed by Pope Benedict XVI.

### What is the 'educational emergency'?

It is important at this point to ask what the highly-charged term 'educational emergency' means. To Pope Benedict, it is broadly the result of a failure to transmit basic human, cultural, and religious values in our educational institutions. A key text is his address to Rome's Diocesan Convention in 2007, a speech notable for its directness. The heart of the argument is that the march of a relativistic mindset can too easily obscure the search for truth in our educational institutions. Given the importance of this intervention for contemporary Catholic educational thinking, two paragraphs merit quotation in full:

Daily experience tells us—as we all know—that precisely in our day educating in the faith is no easy undertaking. Today, in fact, every educational task seems more and more arduous and precarious. Consequently, there is talk of a great "educational emergency", of the increasing difficulty encountered in transmitting the basic values of life and correct behaviour to the new generations, a difficulty that involves both schools and families and, one might say any other body with educational aims.

We may add that this is an inevitable emergency: in a society, in a culture, which all too often make relativism its creed – relativism has become a sort of dogma. In such a society the light of truth is missing; indeed, it is considered dangerous and "authoritarian" to speak of truth, and the end result is doubt about the goodness of life –is it good to be a person? Is it good to be alive?– and in the validity of the relationships and commitments of which it consists (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, para. 13-14).

This critique seems to be part of an ongoing engagement with what is broadly understood as 'progressive education' although I suggest that it is not a *reactionary* response to such intellectual currents. It is a call for genuine dialogue on the appropriate aims of education as seen through the lenses of philosophy and Christian anthropology. The diagnosis of an 'emergency' is, in fact, a *cri de coeur* for a renewed understanding of the aims of education. To Benedict, educational bodies must be rooted in a search for (not construction of) truth and meaning, a journey undertaken in community and not as isolated individuals.

Pope Francis has taken up and developed the trenchant analysis offered by Pope Benedict. In a speech to students of Jesuit schools in Italy and Albania (2013), he included an exhortation to address the challenges that the 'educational challenge presents' without actually detailing what the specific challenges were. A similar approach is visible in *Laudato Si'* (2015a, pp. 202-209) where he mentions the 'great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge', which we face today. The lack of a detailed philosophical analysis suggests that he agrees with the diagnosis provided by Pope Benedict and is, in turn, offering some methodological tools for the response. In other words, Francis is offering a range of accessible and practical methods to implement and apply the scholarly work of Benedict.

### Looking ahead

Evidently, both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis share a distinct sense of unease at the direction of travel in contemporary educational thought and practice. They share a desire to place the Christian message at the service of all people, not just those actively involved in the mission of Catholic education. We must ask whether we can identify some ways ahead for Catholic education in light of the arguments raised above.

'Integral humanism' is a helpful key to understanding fully the message of *Laudato Si'*. The encyclical is both traditional in its anthropology and contemporary in its field of action. It applies the 'educational emergency' (as diagnosed by Pope Benedict) to the challenges arising from a consumerism which limits the scope of the human person to live for others (Pope Francis, 2015a, p. 209).

What does this say to Catholic educationalists? Clearly, Catholic educational thought must be marked by a commitment to dialogue as an important means of engaging with those who deny the value of the transcendent in educational thought (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, p. 20). To be clear, dialogue is a key tool of the *New Evangelisation*, as it brings the Gospel's message to wider society as a contribution to the common good.

Dialogue, however, has the potential to be a multi-edged tool. At its best, internal dialogue within the Church is an expression of the theological notion of *communio*: it seeks to better understand the Christian message with a view to application in daily life. It can also be a vital, indeed indispensable, means of engagement with other worldviews as a way of fostering cooperation and mutual understanding. An important sign of a Christian's commitment to dialogue is the use of language that can be understood by those who tend not to move in traditional Church circles. Is it the case that too much of the Church's contribution to public life is couched in language which appears overly specialized and hence is not shared by many beyond a small circle of cognoscenti? In the section, which follows below, I suggest that the use of term 'ecological education' is a good example of how the Church can reshape its language in order to carry its message to a wider audience.

### Reflecting on 'ecological education' as used by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*?

*Laudato Si'* offers a new direction in Catholic educational thought. It is a development of 'human ecology' as proposed by Pope John Paul II and offers some intellectual energy for a refreshed understanding of what it means to educate in a Catholic perspective. In this section I argue that 'ecological education' is grounded in a nuanced understanding of the term 'human ecology' as used by Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* (1991, p. 39).

#### Human ecology

It is fair to say that, until recently, the word 'ecology' was more commonly used in the world of politics and culture, especially in the context of 'green' politics, rather than in religious circles. In Catholic thought, 'human ecology' has now become an umbrella term describing the complex situation of the human person's multidimensional relationship with other humans, the Earth, and God. It has a strong moral core and no aspect of human life lies outwith the scope of the term. The appropriation of the term by recent popes offers the Church a possible 'way in' to the hearts and minds of many of those who are attracted by the so-called 'green' agenda. It is as much a pedagogical tool as a conceptual framework.

The work of Pope John Paul II is our starting point. In *Centesimus Annus*, he emphasized the primacy of traditional family structures for 'human ecology' (1991, p. 39). He stressed the role of marriage (defined as a union of man and woman) in allowing couples to give of themselves to each other. This mutual self-giving reached its zenith in the commitment marked by the raising of children. The important role of the family is striking, if unsurprising. Human ecology cannot be fully understood, it seems, apart from love. In this respect, Pope John Paul II is locating 'human ecology' in his wider humanistic framework, as the human person cannot be fully human without the commitment to the other, expressed in love.

Pope Benedict, commenting on *Centesimus Annus* in his *Message for the world day of prayer for peace* (2007), made a link between 'natural' and 'human' ecology. He added a further aim; that of 'social ecology'. This 'human ecology' is hence part of a wider 'social ecology', which exists alongside and within the ecology of nature. It is reasonable to ask whether we are in danger of overdoing things here regarding the 'types of ecology' in the same way that Pope Paul VI offered different and undefined types of 'humanism' in *Popolorum Progressio* (1967). While this might be the case, we do need to clarify our definitions and frames of reference in order to avoid confusion.

Pope Benedict returned to the ecological themes in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009b). Paragraph 51 develops the 2007 *Message for the world day of prayer for peace* and serves as an advance notice of the themes taken up in *Laudato Si'*. In many ways, Benedict's language is as striking, trenchant, and forceful as that of Pope Francis. We note the following key themes of the encyclical: a) the need for a radical shift in lifestyles, b) nature is caught up in the dynamics of society and culture, c) human ecology is grounded

on the indispensable foundations of a good 'moral tenor' of society, and d) the book of nature includes the environment, life, sexuality, and marriage. In other words, we cannot focus on one so-called 'moral decline' to the exclusion of the others: all manifestations of decline are, essentially, a consequence of a lack of love and mitigate against the human flourishing we seek.

In sum, 'social ecology', as here employed, suggests an extension of the theology of *communio*: as we are one through baptism, we are also at one on the same planet, affected by decisions and choices made by others. At its core the theology of *Communio* seeks to identify the inner harmony of the shared Catholic theological inheritance, respecting unity in diversity and diversity in unity (Pope Benedict XVI, 1996). It is not another systematic theological model to be placed alongside other such frameworks (Taylor, 2015). Is it possible, therefore, to ask whether 'ecological education' has the potential to lie at the core of Catholic educational thought and thus, in the spirit of *communio*, evolve into a dynamic theological-educational framework for the contemporary Church?

### **'Ecological education' – A new educational lens**

The language of 'human ecology' is, I suggest, more elastic and attractive than philosophically conditioned terms like 'integral humanism'. This is an important point for a Church committed to dialogue. The language of Church teaching must be attractive to a diverse audience and hence offer a way to connect, when possible, theological themes with established terms in the wider social and political discourse. This is an important way to build educational and cultural networks. In other words, the language used in Catholic educational thought must be aimed at drawing in people who would otherwise be reluctant to become involved in Church-led initiatives. As such, 'ecological education, taken in the broad sense sketched out by Pope Francis in Chapter 6 of *Laudato Si'*, has the potential to become a major site of intersection between Catholic and secular thinking on education. It is, perhaps, a development of the *Courtyard of the Gentiles* initiative, Pope Benedict's intellectual outreach to atheists (Franchi, 2014). In this line of thinking, modernist intellectuals are to be seen as partners in dialogue and not 'enemies' towards whom we offer only conceptual barricades and closed minds.

Turning again to the term 'ecological education', we can glimpse, albeit dimly for now, the beginnings of a new lens through which we can plan and evaluate policy for Catholic schools. Of course, 'ecological education', if it is to be successfully applied to Catholic education, needs a definition that goes beyond education in 'traditional' ecological matters. *Laudato Si'* Chapter Six, (Ecological Education and Spirituality) brings together aspects of the 'educational emergency' and ecological matters. A careful reading of this chapter offers four definitions of 'ecological education' (Pope Francis, 2015a, p. 214), none of which has an explicit angle of faith formation, but each retains a distinct root in a Christian anthropology: responsible simplicity of life, grateful contemplation of God's world, concern for the needs of the poor, and protection of the environment.

What will this set of definitions mean for policymaking in Catholic education? Are these terms too broad to be of any value or does this breadth offer local agencies certain opportunities to work out practical applications appropriate to the circumstances?

'Ecological education' can initially be explored alongside the traditional understanding of Catholic education as a site of 'formation in faith'. To Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, to be formed in faith is to encounter God in creation, which leads, in turn, to a sacramentally-rooted commitment to simplicity of life (2015a, p. 219). The introduction of 'ecological education' hence marks a fresh direction in the underpinning principles of Catholic education. 'Ecological education' here is more than simply one theme of Catholic education, but could offer a wider conceptual framework that, in the spirit of *communio*, unites traditional Catholic spirituality with the commitment to make significant and long-lasting changes to the way in which we live.



## Ecological education: Implications for policy in Catholic education

In this section I offer some initial thoughts on the implications of *Laudato Si'* for the project of Catholic education.

### Policymaking in Catholic education

Policymakers in Catholic education come in two related groups: At the macro level we have the Magisterium of the Church, the Roman Curia and national Bishops' Conferences; at the micro level, we have national Catholic education bodies (usually linked to Bishops' Conferences), Directors/Advisers of (Religious) Education and School Principals /Head Teachers. Both groups are called upon to apply general principles to local contexts. As such, there is a substantial responsibility placed on the shoulders of the said policymakers (Congregation for Catholic Education 2013, pp. 70-75).

To open a debate on how policymakers can respond to *Laudato Si'*, I offer some thoughts on how ecological education could influence the pedagogy of the Catholic school.

### The pedagogy of Catholic education: General principles revisited

The pedagogy of the Catholic school is linked to its locus at the heart of the Church's life. Although it is a civic institution and hence open to all, the Catholic school reflects the principles of *communio* as noted above. The Catholic school is a community of faith and learning where pupils are part of the life of the school, and not simply clients or consumers of education. The active fostering of good interpersonal relations between the staff of the school and between staff and pupils is one manifestation of *communio*.

*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue* (2013) argues that 'intercultural dialogue' is a key feature of the Catholic school. The curriculum offers an opportunity, and not just in religious education, to *encounter* the Catholic way. This is where (inter) cultural dialogue can take place fruitfully. What does this mean for pedagogy?

The importance placed on intercultural dialogue in the Catholic school is a major shift in the understanding of the aims and purposes of the Catholic school. If ecological education as understood by Pope Francis is now regarded as another key driver of Catholic education, are there consequences for the curriculum? To be clear, reflection on 'ecological education' can surely enhance the curricula currently in place. It could, for example, offer a fresh look at on how Catholic religious education can become an outward-facing enterprise, both knowledge-rich and wisdom-centred, with implicit evangelical implications.

*Laudato Si'*'s use of the phrase 'less is more' (Pope Francis, 2015a, p. 222) brings together the need for personal conversion and corporate responsibility. Institutions of Christian inspiration need to be wary of an unhealthy obsession with consumption and material prosperity for its own sake. I suggest here that 'less is more' is powerful pedagogical advice for those charged with looking after policy in Catholic education. There are two manifestations of this that could be worth highlighting.

The first is *simplicity of teaching*. The good Catholic school seeks to avoid unnecessary complications and is suspicious of the continuous search for novelty. In other words, it sees itself as rooted in cherished educational traditions from a range of historical and cultural contexts. The pedagogy of Catholic education is located in an established worldview (it could not be otherwise); nonetheless, a Catholic school, while holding on to insights from tradition, cannot be a museum of educational practices and must be willing to learn from contemporary educational initiatives and ideas.

The second regards *the use of technology* in education. The contemporary push for 'online learning', while broadly to be welcomed, risks the marginalization of the human person from the educational process. There can be little doubt that, when used successfully, online initiatives can bring together people from different contexts in ways that traditional onsite learning struggles to achieve. These 'virtual' communities of learning seem to reflect the principles of *communio* in their capacity to unite in shared

endeavours those who might otherwise never get the opportunity to gather together. At the same time, the role of the teacher cannot become that of an innocent bystander who simply observes and does not engage in students' education. In Catholic education the teacher is there to act as role model, to guide, warn, and, when necessary, instruct (Davis & Franchi, 2013; Rymarz, 2013).

Catholic religious education, as the core of the Catholic school, needs solid theological bases in order to succeed as a promoter of Christian understanding of culture. To illustrate what this could mean in the context of 'ecological education' as a contemporary development of 'integral humanism', there needs to be a robust and systematic study of the doctrine of the Trinity and, crucially, of the divine Person of Jesus Christ. The intellectual architecture of Christian humanism is predicated on the Redemption: the title of Pope John Paul's encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* ('Redeemer of Man') is a profound theological statement for Catholic religious education. *Laudato Si'*, in paragraphs 238-240 (entitled 'The Trinity and the Relationship Between Creatures'), offers some food for thought, as the Incarnation is at the heart of the 'new humanism'. To proclaim Jesus as 'divine' in a secular culture which values relativism over the possibility of ultimate truth is self-evidently problematic for dialogue with other monotheistic traditions. Allied to this is the Christian belief in God as a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. In paragraph 240 of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis aligns successful relationships with the externalization of oneself 'to live in communion with God, with others, and with all creatures'. This is an example of a theology which needs a solid cognitive base in order for the pastoral elements to flourish.

A task for policymakers is to find fresh ways to re-present the mystery of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ to those in Catholic schools who manifest diminished religious literacy. To engage in wider ecological initiatives without a firm grounding in the necessary theological underpinning of the 'Catholic mind' is to promote a form of altruism, not Christian love.

One consequence of the diminishing levels of religious commitment and knowledge of religious culture in Catholic schools is, paradoxically, the gradual emergence of religious education syllabi with substantial theological content. This is particularly marked in Scotland and Ireland, where new syllabi have recently received a *recognitio* from the Holy See (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015; Scottish Catholic Education Service, 2011). This return to theological rigour is to be welcomed, although a caveat is necessary: while it is relatively easy to put together a theologically challenging curriculum, there is the concomitant obligation to offer the necessary levels of support to those who are called upon to teach the material.

### Discussion and concluding remarks

This article has argued that the use of ‘ecological education’ in *Laudato Si’* is an important moment for the Catholic Church’s many educational agencies. There is, of course, the danger that this term lies hidden in the document and only appears from time to time in local documents and at academic seminars. This would be a pity as, understood in the wider context of ‘integral humanism’, the proposal for ‘ecological education’ has the potential to act as a bridge between traditional Catholic doctrine and Catholic social teaching. Additionally, it has the potential to draw people of no religious tradition into the discussion of how we can create a world that is more just for all.

There are also questions that need to be asked regarding the direction of religious education in Catholic schools. While the Magisterium has accepted the limitations of approaches too closely aligned with catechesis, are we prepared, for example, to offer a structured course of studies in Christology, which, in its senior phase, places appropriate cognitive demands on the pupils? Do we challenge those who wish to align syllabi of religious education closely with a flatter ‘religious studies’ approach and thus weaken the theological vision offered?

As we look ahead, much remains to be done. The remarks of Pope Francis to the World Congress for Catholic Education (2015c) offer some food for thought. He proposed the ‘works of mercy’ as a form of charter for Catholic education, especially in response to the Year of Mercy. At the start of the ‘question and answer session’ he said (in Italian – there is no official translation yet available so I offer my own):

We cannot talk of Catholic education without talking about humanity because Catholic identity, to be precise, is rooted in the God who became man [Non si può parlare di educazione cattolica senza parlare di umanità, perché precisamente l’identità cattolica è Dio che si è fatto uomo] (para. 2).

Even in the context of an informal dialogue, Pope Francis uses the imagery of humanism to encourage the work of those involved in Catholic education. To align ‘ecological education’ and ‘integral humanism’ is an intellectual challenge for contemporary Catholic educators. This article has set out some initial lines of engagement for this process.

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