

Laudato Si, Environmental Theology and the Leadership of Pope Francis

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Laudato Si, Environmental Theology, Christian Leadership, Environmental Ethics

Received : 04, December

Revised : 09, January

Accepted: 15, February

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the interaction between environmental theology and leadership in the context of Pope Francis' "Laudato Si", with a particular focus on the role of Christian leaders in addressing environmental issues. Using descriptive qualitative methods, the study analyses the encyclical "Laudato Si" and related Catholic Church documents. The article finds that theological concepts such as "Salvation and Liberation," "Obedience to God the Creator," and "Social and Ecological Justice" play an important role in shaping Christian leaders' attitudes and actions towards the environment. This article provides insights into how Christian leadership can inspire and mobilise environmentally responsible action, showing that this responsibility is not only a moral imperative, but also an expression of deep Christian faith.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues and climate change have become one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity today. Scientific data and research have confirmed that climate change has led to rising global temperatures, extreme weather, rising sea levels and significant ecosystem damage (Masson-Delmotte, et al, 2022). The impacts of climate change are not only ecological, but also have serious social and economic impacts. Severe ecosystem damage can threaten the survival of humans and many other species on the planet (Steffen et al., 2015).

The importance of protecting nature and facing ecological challenges also has roots in religious beliefs and values. In the Christian context, theological views on God's creation and humanity's responsibility to care for it play an important role in shaping attitudes towards the environment (Pope Francis, 2015). Pope Francis, in his famous encyclical "Laudato Si': On the Care of Our Common Home" (2015), connects climate change and the ecological crisis with the moral call to care for the environment as an expression of God's love for his creation. Pope Francis taught that we all need to have a new way of a total cultural revolution and pay attention to the negative impact we have on the environment (Jati, 2017).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

However, the importance of integrating theological values with Christian leadership in addressing ecological challenges is still a subject of research that has not been fully revealed. Ajisuksmo, Rosario, & Soge (2023) emphasise that Christian leaders should pay attention to environmental challenges and lead in an environmentally responsible manner, as well as criticise development activities that do not support the good of the natural environment and examine spiritual values in political and economic decisions. This article will analyse the concepts in "Laudato Si'" and explain how this understanding can shape the practice of Christian leadership in response to ecological challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand and analyse the relationship between environmental theology and Christian leadership in the context of "Laudato Si'" by Pope Francis. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore complex phenomena in their natural context, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the research subjects (Creswell, 2014). This method involves collecting data through various sources, including document analysis and the study of relevant literature.

The main document analysed was the encyclical "Laudato Si'" by Pope Francis, along with other Catholic Church documents relating to the environment. The analysis aimed to identify key themes in Catholic teaching on the environment and human responsibility. A literature review was conducted to gain insight into the theory and practice of ecological leadership in the Christian context, as well as to understand the framework of environmental theology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Theological Context

The concept of "Salvation and Liberation" in Christian theology encompasses a broad and inclusive perspective on salvation, which is not only limited to the spiritual aspect and salvation of human beings, but also extends to the entire creation. The verse in Romans 8:21, which states "That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.," provides a profound theological view of the relationship between the salvation of human beings and the salvation of the entire creation. This verse emphasises that salvation, in the Christian context, is an inclusive divine plan, in which the whole of creation has a share in restoration and liberation from corruption and suffering. In this view, salvation does not only mean rescue from sin and death, but also deliverance from all forms of damage, including environmental damage caused by human activities.

Boff (1997), in his work "Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor" delves deeper into this concept by integrating liberation theological thinking with ecology. Boff argues that the current environmental crisis is a reflection of social and spiritual injustice, suggesting that environmental degradation and social suffering are intertwined. In this context, salvation and liberation must be understood as the restoration of the whole of creation, including humans and nature. This demands a shift in human perspective and action, from exploitation of nature to responsible stewardship. From a Christian leadership perspective, this implies a responsibility to not only guide people in spiritual matters, but also in safeguarding and caring for creation. This includes encouraging environmental awareness, advocating for policies that favour nature conservation, and educating communities on the importance of a lifestyle that is sustainable and in harmony with nature.

The second concept, "obedience to God the creator" is rooted in Genesis 2:15, which emphasises humanity's responsibility to cultivate and care for God's creation. Pope Francis in "Laudato Si" reiterates this theme, calling on human beings to fulfil their role as responsible stewards of God's creation. This is not just about avoiding environmental damage, but also about actively contributing to the maintenance and restoration of nature. This concept challenges Christian leaders to encourage their communities to actively engage in practices that support environmental sustainability and show deep respect for creation.

Psalm 24:1, reminds us that the earth and everything in it belongs to God. This idea, deepened in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, underscores the interconnectedness of social and ecological justice. The Catholic Church teaches that responsibility for the environment is not separate from responsibility for our fellow human beings, especially the poor and marginalised. This creates a framework in which environmental and social justice become inseparable, and Christian leaders are required to promote sustainable policies and practices, both in environmental and social contexts.

The "Understanding of Ecosystems and Balance" illustrated in Proverbs 8:29, shows God's wisdom in creating the balance of nature. "The Great Work: Our Way into the Future" explores this concept further, stating that an understanding of ecosystems and sustainability is key to the future of our planet

(Berry, 2000). In this paper, Christian leaders are required to have a deep understanding of ecology and the balance of nature, and apply it in their policies and initiatives. This involves education and advocacy towards practices that ensure ecosystem sustainability, as well as endeavours to maintain balance and biodiversity.

Christian Leadership Context

As Christian Leadership context, there are at least 7 important dimensions in the encyclical *Laudato Si*:

1. Ecological Leadership

Pope Francis emphasises the need for ecological leadership that is responsible for the environment. Leaders at all levels, including church leaders at all levels and governments. They are urged to take concrete steps to protect nature. The Word of God affirms the function of ecological leadership as written in Genesis 2:15 "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

The understanding of ecological leadership in a Christian perspective takes its roots from the teachings of the Bible, where Pope Francis in "*Laudato Si*" highlights Genesis 2:15 as the theological foundation underlying human responsibility towards God's creation. The verse, "And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it," provides the basis for the understanding that humans are not merely inhabitants of the earth, but are also entrusted as caretakers and preservers of the environment.

In the context of Christian leadership, leaders at all levels are called to model this responsibility. Ecological leadership is not only concerned with the management of natural resources, but also with empowering people to live a more sustainable lifestyle and be responsible towards God's creation. It is important to note that ecological leadership in a Christian context is not only about concrete actions to protect the environment, but also about influence and teaching. Christian leaders are expected to spread awareness of the importance of caring for God's creation to their congregations and motivate them to become agents of change in maintaining ecological sustainability and justice.

Pope Francis, through "*Laudato Si*," affirms that ecological leadership must be based on ethics and morality that stem from the teachings of Christ. By recognising the beauty and goodness of God's creation, Christian leaders are expected to lead with integrity, illustrating the harmony between faith and action in caring for nature. Capra (2018) even writes that Pope Francis has single-handedly brought the Catholic Church to the forefront of the ecological movement and established himself as a true world leader.

Ecological leadership from a Christian perspective is therefore not only about managing environmental aspects, but also about leading with love, wisdom and moral responsibility. Christian leaders are invited to be spiritual mentors who guide their people in understanding and applying the principles of sustainability and environmental conservation in their daily lives. Pope Francis not only provides guidance for Christian leaders to take action to protect the environment, but also invites them to deepen spiritual values in their leadership,

creating holistic and sustainable change in the governance of the earth mandated by God. As such, ecological leadership in a Christian context is not just a task, but a calling to illustrate God's love for all of His creation through action and example.

2. Leadership Integrity

Leadership integrity, as reflected in Psalm 78:72-"And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them"-creates a strong ethical foundation for Christian leaders. David, as the leader described in the verse, led with breech and meticulousness, demonstrating his deep commitment and responsibility to the task given to him by God.

In the context of Christian leadership, integrity is not only about honesty and truthfulness, but also about faithfulness to the teachings of Christ. Leaders with integrity are recognised for their honesty in managing their responsibilities, both to people and to God. Leadership with integrity involves decisions that are based on the values of truth and morality contained in the teachings of the Bible.

Pope Francis encourages Christian leaders to demonstrate honesty and consistency in their efforts to maintain environmental sustainability. This involves active engagement in addressing ecological challenges as well as cohesion in exercising the values of truth and justice in decision-making. Sadowski (2016) concluded that integrity in ecological leadership reflects a commitment to act in accordance with the moral and ethical principles underlying religious beliefs. Effective Christian leadership is leadership in which the active leader connects vision and faith, because these two things are basically interconnected so that they cannot be separated, because a leader who has strong faith sees the presentday situation, but also sees the future state (Nicolas, D. G., Rk, T. A., Siahaan, S. S. S., Putro, L. J., & Amtiran, A. A., 2022). By integrating integrity in leadership, Christian leaders can play a significant role in shaping the way society views environmental conservation and create a positive impact in the effort to protect the earth. To implement the values of Psalm 78:72, Christian leaders are invited to lead by example, demonstrating wisdom and intelligence grounded in moral principles. Leadership with integrity in an ecological context involves wise decisions in engaging and guiding communities towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

3. The Urgency of Understanding through Education

As stated in Proverbs 9:9, "Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning." is closely related to the vision of wise and responsible Christian leadership towards God's creation. This verse reflects the call to constantly learn and grow in understanding. In the context of Christian leadership, education is not only about the acquisition of knowledge, but also about character building and an understanding of moral and ethical responsibilities. Within the framework of "Laudato Si'," Pope Francis emphasises that Christian leaders need to have a deep understanding of environmental issues and motivate others to participate in caring for the earth.

The educational approach emphasised in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be

ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth," emphasises the importance of integrity and wisdom in the sharing of knowledge. Christian leaders are expected to be role models who educate their neighbours, reflect righteous values and guide their communities with proper wisdom and understanding.

In the context of "Laudato Si'," education regarding the collective responsibility to care for the earth includes not only the transfer of knowledge, but also includes the formation of attitudes and values that value sustainability. Christian leaders are expected to motivate and empower others to learn and participate in actions that sustain the universe. Orobator (2021) even calls Laudato Si as A prophetic Message that becomes a solution and even provides a pedagogical direction for ecological education. From another perspective, Yunansah, H., & Herlambang, Y. T. (2017) in their research conveyed the new development of ecological education packaged as ecopedagogics.

The importance of education in ecology highlights that effective leaders must have in-depth knowledge of environmental issues, as well as the ability to guide and empower others to play an active role in protecting the earth. Ahmad (2010) argues that environment-based education will contribute greatly to the future of human ecology and its sustainability.

In the context of "Laudato Si'", Pope Francis encourages ecological education starting from the smallest unit, namely the family, school, and catechetical media. Through awareness of the past and present, education and religion must communicate the ideal of life. Pope Francis also emphasises the need for ecological education to build the world by participating in the civil and political spheres (Prasetyo, 2020).

4. Global Solidarity

Illustrated in Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ," and Colossians 3:11, "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." becomes a core principle of Christian leadership manifested in environmental responsibility.

In the context of "Laudato Si'," global solidarity is not just a theological concept, but a concrete call to unite as one humanity in taking care of our common home, the Earth. Galatians 6:2 emphasises our obligation to help others and share burdens, creating an ethical foundation for inclusive and sustainability-oriented Christian leadership. Colossians 3:11 highlights the elimination of all distinction and separation in Christ. This principle provides the theological basis for an ecological pastoral approach that engages all elements of society indiscriminately. In Christian leadership, global solidarity involves not only caring for environmental issues at the local level, but also understanding and participating in the global responsibility towards the earth.

Christian leadership in the context of global solidarity and "Laudato Si'" teaches that leaders are not only responsible for their communities, but also share in the global responsibility of sustaining the earth. Global solidarity views

ecological challenges as shared problems that require collaboration across borders and active engagement in efforts to protect and restore the environment.

Christian leadership inspired by these principles creates space for collaboration between churches, communities and nations, creating a resilient global solidarity movement in the care of God's creation. Pope Francis is also forthright in his critique of developmentalism, which purports to "improve the welfare of the people" but ultimately destroys them, *Laudato Si* is consistent with the theological values of justice, peace, and integration of creation (Ranboki, 2017).

Kelly (2016) adds that there is a fruitful interplay between ecumenical endeavours within the Christian faith and environmental concerns that increases the global church's awareness of environmental issues, through diverse church traditions. The solidarity of Christian communities is increasingly recognising the importance of protecting nature. Thus, "*Laudato Si*" is not only a call to bear a common burden, but also a call to work together ecumenically in an effort to safeguard and restore the sustainability of the earth, reflecting love and care for our common home, entrusted by God to humanity. Through *Laudato Si*, the Church teaches the need for a change of heart and has a new way of a total cultural revolution for the common home of humanity (Jati, 2017), in this case certainly a change of heart to be more solidary to the environment at large.

5. Social and Ecological Responsibility

It is emphasised in Matthew 25:40, "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" and James 2:14,17, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" and "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" are the moral basis and concrete demands of Christian leadership.

Matthew 25:40 teaches that every act done towards others, especially those in need, is also an act towards Christ himself. In the context of "*Laudato Si*", this provides a moral basis for Christian leaders to view every step in protecting and caring for the environment as worship and devotion to God. Social and ecological responsibility becomes an integral part of Christian ministry and faith. Pope Francis highlighted the importance of reducing poverty and helping people experiencing poverty to achieve balanced survival (Jati, 2017).

James 2:14,17 highlights the importance of concrete actions as evidence of a living faith. Christian leaders, who are called to set an example, are expected to demonstrate their faith through concrete actions in maintaining sustainability and social justice. This verse affirms that a living faith should be reflected in concrete responsibilities towards one's neighbour and the environment.

In "*Laudato Si*", Pope Francis reinforces this concept by emphasising that Christian leaders cannot just have a hidden faith, but must make it real through action. Socially and ecologically responsible Christian leaders not only fulfil their moral obligations but also create a positive impact in society and the environment. In line with this, Gaol (2022) argues in the context of Christian

leadership emphasises the importance of love, mercy, justice, and social responsibility.

Amtiran (2019) argues *misio Deo* always in contact with culture, so culture does not need to be conflicted if it can be a bridge for the entry of the Gospel. Christian leaders are not only measured by words or beliefs, but also by their real deeds in maintaining social and environmental justice. Social and ecological responsibility is not just an optional agenda, but a demanding vocation that is lived out by the Christian faith.

6. Environmental Ethics

The importance of environmental ethics, as conveyed in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day," and Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" create a solid moral foundation for Christian leadership in environmental sustainability.

These verses emphasise that God's creation is good, and humans are given the responsibility to care for it with respect. In the context of Christian leadership, this creates a moral call for leaders to lead with concern for the sustainability of nature and the surrounding environment, remembering that God's creation is a gift that must be preserved and honoured.

Christian leadership in "Laudato Si" is strengthened by the understanding that humans not only have rights over God's creation, but also have an ethical responsibility to care for and maintain the earth. The verse Job 41:2, "Can you put a cord through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook?" conveys that the earth and everything in it belongs to God, and humans are given the responsibility to be faithful custodians.

In Christian leadership, environmental ethics involves recognising that environmental sustainability is the collective responsibility of all humanity. Christian leaders are called to be pioneers in guiding their people to live according to ethical values that reflect responsibility for God's creation.

The importance of environmental ethics in the context of Christian leadership and "Laudato Si" is the call to lead with wisdom and integrity, create policies and actions that support sustainability, and motivate and engage communities in efforts to safeguard and care for the environment. Capra, F. (2018) states that environmental ethics is not just a theological concept, but a practical guideline for action in protecting the earth as God's mandate and as an expression of love for others.

7. Ecological Spirituality

Prioritizing spiritual values, as stated in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you," creates the foundation for Christian leadership that prioritizes spiritual truth in efforts to maintain environmental sustainability.

This verse emphasizes that in efforts to protect the environment, we must give priority to the search for the Kingdom of God and His values. In the context of Christian leadership, this creates a call to lead with spiritual guidance, seek truth, and create policies that reflect spiritual values in caring for God's creation.

Belay., Hermanto, & Rivosa (2021) argue that Biblical Spirituality emphasizes spiritual values as the foundation of Christian leadership.

Galatians 5:22-23 presents the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In Christian leadership, these spiritual values become guidelines for acting in love and justice towards the environment. Love will create deep concern for the earth and all living creatures in it. In "Laudato Si'," Pope Francis emphasized that Christian leaders must seek and implement these spiritual values in their daily decision-making and actions. "Laudato Si'" invites Christians to develop ecological spirituality, a deeper connection with nature as a path to God, as outlined by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (2014).

Christian leaders who seek God's Kingdom are more likely to produce policies and initiatives that create a just and sustainable society. Ajisuksmo, Rosario, & Soge (2023) emphasize the need for deep ecological conversion as a form of strengthening spiritual values to help us "find God in everything", through the beauty of creation, realizing that spiritual life is inseparable from worldly reality. Actions that can be taken are promoting creation-based liturgical celebrations, developing ecological catechesis, retreat and formation programs, etc.

Prioritizing spiritual values in the context of Christian leadership and "Laudato Si'" not only views the environment as a technical or economic problem, but also as an integral part of the spiritual journey and a deeper relationship with God. A spiritual approach is an approach that pays attention to moral-ethical encouragement, faith and love for others (Leba, 2017)

Therefore, in an effort to maintain environmental sustainability, prioritizing spiritual values becomes a call to lead with conscience which is reflected in love, wisdom and a deep sense of responsibility towards God's creation. Seeking God's Kingdom is the first step to creating a society that reflects His values and preserving the environment as a show of obedience and love to the Creator.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Laudato Si'" provides a strong foundation for the development of leadership that is responsive to environmental challenges. Pope Francis firmly invites leaders at all levels, especially church and government leaders, to take an active role in protecting nature as a form of ecological leadership. Moral and ethical integrity, as core values, are appointed as the main foundation in the formation of effective leadership. In addition, education is identified as a key instrument in forming a collective understanding of environmental responsibility, embracing the concept that environmental awareness needs to be instilled through a holistic educational process.

The importance of global solidarity and the integration of social and ecological responsibility in decision making is also a key point emphasized in this encyclical. Leadership is expected to not only understand the social and ecological impacts of their decisions but also actively collaborate globally to address environmental challenges. Environmental ethics is made a solid

foundation, creating a deep foundation for sustainable leadership development. Finally, prioritizing spiritual values as the main foundation in directing society towards justice and sustainability is an important call that must be lived up to by leaders.

In the context of environmental theology, understanding the role and responsibility of humans in caring for creation becomes the center of attention, especially in Christian leadership. Environmental theology, as a developing field, explores the dynamic relationship between faith and environmental care practices, highlighting how Christian teachings and values can guide responsible behavior and decisions towards nature. As explained by Moo (2018), the Bible provides the foundation for this understanding, suggesting that humans have a special role as stewards of God's creation. Meanwhile, Fletcher (2015) explains how Christian leaders can inspire and mobilize their communities to act ecologically, combining faith and environmental justice in the practices of everyday life. These two references help frame the discussion regarding how Christian leadership can and should play a role in addressing contemporary environmental challenges, showing that this responsibility is not only a moral imperative, but also an expression of deep Christian faith. Thus, "Laudato Si" is not only a theological guide but also a significant source of inspiration for forming leadership that prioritizes the environment and sustainability.

FURTHER STUDY

For further research, it is suggested to examine how the environmental theology expressed in *Laudato Si* relates to social issues, such as poverty, inequality, and justice. How does a holistic approach to ecology manifest in the church's response to these challenges?

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