

Chapter Seventeen

LAUDATO SI': THE CRY OF THE EARTH AND THE CRY OF THE POOR IN NIGERIA

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Executive Summary

The core principle of *Laudato Si* was the call to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Following St Francis of Assisi, *Laudato Si*, speaks of the earth as our sister 'who cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her'. He speaks of the poor calling out to us for justice and a share at the table. Today, in Nigeria, this principle is being violated in various ways. The earth is crying because of innocent blood that is being spilled everyday, farms are being destroyed, which has caused a lot of hunger to the poor and the vulnerable. This goes against another principle of this encyclical, which is the common good. Therefore, this paper is a call to Nigerians to care for our common home and improve our relationship with our natural and social environments.

Keywords: *Laudato Si*, The Earth, The Poor, Nigeria, Pope Francis, Ecosystem, Common Home

Introduction

In the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis relates the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Literally, cry is a metaphor with different meanings. It can mean the feeling of pain and suffering, the experience of sadness and loss calling out for relief and

sympathy.¹ The emphasis made in this work is that there is no difference between the cry of the earth and that of the poor. Both are linked together in the encyclical. There is an Igbo adage which says, 'when the eyes are crying, the nose cries as well'. That is exactly the case as pertains this paper.

Laudato Si, is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. It has as the subtitle 'On care for our common home'. In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take swift and unified global action.

Laudato Si (Be Praised) presents a special intuition of Pope Francis. An approach of the encyclical highlights that everything is closely interrelated. "If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment".²

In fact, the cry of the earth is not different from the cry of the poor; nor is the ecological crisis different from social crisis. "The second goal of *Laudato Si*' is thus a call to respond to the Cry of the Poor defending life in all its forms, with special attention to

¹ Canceran, Delfo Cortina (2019) "Climate Justice: The Cry of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor (The Case of the Yolanda/Hayain Tragedy in the Philippines)," *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1 , Article 5. Available at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/solidarity/vol8/iss1/5>

² *Laudato Si*, §142

vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, migrants, unborn children and children at risk of modern slavery”³.

It is obvious that many people believe that the ecological crisis implies climate crisis. This is “because the climate crisis is one of the most pervasive manifestations of the ecological crisis”⁴. It is not possible to talk about protecting the environment while we are consciously neglecting the needs of the Earth’s most vulnerable people. If we want to protect the future of the earth, *Laudato sí* calls or demands that we look at the environmental crisis also as an issue of social justice, which hitherto encourages that we safeguard and protect the interests of our brothers and sisters especially the poor and the vulnerable. “The actual ecological crisis is thus a spiritual crisis, too. The ecological conversion and the care for each other and for creation needs a spiritual conversion. Pope Francis, therefore, speaks of an integral ecology, that is environmental, economic, social, cultural, and daily life ecology, that is a human ecology (LS138-155)”⁵.

The Core Principles of *Laudato Si*

‘*Laudato Si*’ discussed extensively on the principle of common good. “Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. According to the Pope, common good means that “everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice

³ John Paul Pezzi, MCCJ., (2021). “The Cry of the Poor, *Laudato Si* 2nd Goal”. New York, **Jpic-jp.org**, *Translated by: Jpic-jp.org*. Available at <https://www.joic-jp.org>the-cry-of-the-poor-laudato-si...>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

and faithfulness to others”.⁶ As Francis formulates this principle in *Laudato Si*, the Church Fathers of Vatican Council II offer a precise definition of common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment”.⁷ Some years ago, Pope Benedict XVI explained the Common Good as follows: “It is the good of all of us, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.”⁸

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents common good as the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. Common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence especially those who exercise the office of authority. Common good consists of three essential elements: First, the common good considers that everyone deserves to be respected as a person. Therefore, in the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of each person. Second, the common good promotes the social well-being and development of the group itself. Development in this sense becomes the epitome of all social duties. And finally, the common good requires the stability and security of a just order, which brings peace in the community. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable

⁶ Carol Seagar, St Thomas More’s Catholic Primary School available in www.stm.tas.edu.au/newsletters. July 30, 2015 accessed on 7/12/2015

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 26

⁸ *Caritas in Veritate*, 7

means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence....⁹

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis writes "the principle of the common good immediately becomes logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods...."¹⁰ Indeed, according to brother Richard, "the Common Good makes clear how we are all connected, and responsible for the well-being of others."¹¹ He went further to point out that "Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis both have made clear that this responsibility extends to the future generations (LS 159), and our common home: earth. Contributing to the Common Good is not only something that we can do out of our own abundance, but something that will come at our own expense. Real almsgiving, wrote Pope Benedict in 2007, might mean giving all. But then again, isn't that what our Lord has done for us?"¹²

The human person is endowed with some basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It also has to do with the overall welfare of the society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups when the principle of subsidiarity is applied. The common good thus calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice. Whenever this is violated, violence always

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1906-1909)

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, §158.

¹¹ Richard Steenvoorde, O.P. available in English.op.org/godzdogz/laudato-si-common-good, Oct 20, 2015. Accessed on 6/12/2015

¹² Richard Steenvoorde, O.P.

ensues. Society as a whole and the state, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.¹³

Apart from the principle of the common good, there is also the principle of responsibility for maintaining the integrity of creation which the Pope linked with the creation account. In the book of Genesis, the creation accounts contain in their own symbolic and narrative language, deep teachings on human existence and its historical reality. They disclose the fact that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: relationship with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. As presented by the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken by man both outwardly and within us. The harmony that existed between the Creator, humanity and creation was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our limitations. This brought distortion over the mandate given to man by God to have dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to till it and keep it (Gen 2:15). As a result of this, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19).¹⁴

The Pope further illustrated the principle of responsibility in the following words: “we are not God. The earth was here before us, and it has been given to us.... The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing, or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility

¹³ Laudato Si, §157.

¹⁴ Laudato Si, §66.

between human beings and nature”.¹⁵ The principle of common good also links up with the principle of justice. If we don't take care of the common good invariably it translates to injustice. Here the Pope moves into the area of morality, equity, and justice. According to John Cardinal Onaiyekan, “the present situation of environmental degradation as a result of careless human activities is an issue of moral justice. This is because those who are messing up our common home are especially the rich and powerful nations. Unfortunately, therefore, greater impacts are being thrown on the poor and weaker nations while at the same time mortgaging the future of all nations.”¹⁶

The Cry of the Earth

Man is a being endowed with freedom and some persons believe that their freedom cannot be hindered by anyone, that is to say that they are free to do whatever they want without interference, and, therefore, free to explore and exploit. Such exaggerated freedom is part of the problem which the encyclical is addressing. Pope Francis reminds us in the words of Pope Benedict asking us to “recognize that the natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. The social environment has also suffered damage. Both are ultimately due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless”.¹⁷ He further pointed out that “we have forgotten that man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature. With paternal concern, Benedict urged us to realize that creation is harmed where we ourselves have the final word, where

¹⁵ *Laudato Si*, § 67.

¹⁶ Onaiyekan, J.O., message to United Nations' Secretary on Climate Change in Abuja on 24/08/2015.

¹⁷ *Laudato Si*, § 6.

everything is simply our property, and we use it for ourselves alone. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves".¹⁸

The Cry of the Poor

The word 'poor' means several things. It can mean a lack. This lack may be money, or necessary facilities for conducive living. One can be both materially and spiritually poor. Other dimensions of poverty can be viewed as "economic, social, political, and legal"¹⁹.

In this context, *Laudato Si*, refers to those being deprived of their welfare in the society, and their inalienable or basic human rights. For example every human being has right to live. But one of the serious crimes against humanity today is lack of respect for the human life. The poor is crying for social injustice meted on them. In many parts of the world, the basic needs of the people are neglected because of selfishness and greed. Therefore, Pope Francis in this encyclical spoke strongly about the principle of common good as explained above. For him the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice. And he went further to say that whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Thus, Society, and the state, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.²⁰

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Ellis, G.F.R. The dimensions of poverty. *Soc Indic Res* **15**, 229–253 (1984).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00668672>

²⁰ ²⁰ *Laudato Si*, §157

The Cry of the Poor and the Vulnerable in Nigeria

Who are the poor and vulnerable in Nigeria? The poor and the vulnerable in Nigeria are those who have been denied of choices and opportunities, those whose human dignity have been violated. They are those who lack the basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. The poor and vulnerable are those who do not have enough to feed and clothe themselves, those who do not have access to a school or clinic to go to; those who do not have any land on which to grow their food, simply because, their lands have been forcefully taken away from them, those driven away from their homes, which has led to the creating of IDP. Those that can be kidnapped at any time be it in their homes or on the street, etc. They are those who are denied their human freedom of worship. Those who have no job to earn their living, even though graduates. The poor and vulnerable are those who suffer from insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities. They are those who are prone to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. The poor and the vulnerable in Nigeria are those who defenceless.

Almost all the encyclicals that make up the social teaching of the Catholic Church are concerned about the poor and the vulnerable. One of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching is known as 'Preferential Option for the Poor'. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis makes a subtle but significant advancement on this; he writes not only out of concern for the poor and vulnerable, but brings their concerns, their voice and their perspective right to the heart of the encyclical. The perspective of the poor is clearly seen in the document (*Laudato Si'*).

The Pope writes scornfully about those with power who are far removed from the poor, who never come into contact with them and experience their concerns. For Pope Francis, to help and love the most vulnerable means being close to them. Throughout the document, the fate of the poor and the planet are repeatedly linked as mentioned above. This is because they are the ones who most closely share in the pain of the earth. They cry out as it cries out, yet have done so little to cause it.

Actions to be taken to Achieve the 2nd Goal of *Laudato Si*

The 2nd goal of *Laudato Si* as mentioned above is a call to respond to the Cry of the Poor defending life in all its forms, with special attention to vulnerable groups. Pope Francis proffers ways to be taken to achieve the 2nd goal in his message for the 54th World Day of Peace (2021), '*A culture of care as a path to peace*'. In no. 6, he explains *the principles of the Church's social doctrine*.

First, he spoke about care as promotion of the dignity and rights of each person. The word person according to Pope Francis 'always' signifies relationship, not individualism. Since it signifies relationship, it, therefore, affirms inclusion, not exclusion, which buttressed uniqueness and inviolable dignity, in that case no exploitation. Following his argument, each human person is seen as an end in himself or herself, not as a means to be valued only for his or her usefulness. Human rights are derived from this dignity, so also do human duties. Everyone is our neighbor, near or far in space and time, whether white or black, Christian or Muslim, South or North.

Second was care for the common good. The Pope emphasized that the common good is the total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, no matter your status or your origin to reach their fulfilment more fully and more

easily. Our plans and projects should always take into account their effects on the entire human family, and consider their consequences for the present and for coming generations.

Third was the care through solidarity, which concretely expresses our love for one another.

Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing.²¹

Solidarity shows togetherness, not as a vague sentiment but as a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to the good of all and of everyone, because we are all responsible for all. Solidarity also seeks for compassion. With compassion we feel the need and pain of our brothers and sisters, and the needs of every other thing created by God. In feeling the need and pain of our neighbours, the Good Samaritan comes to mind. The concept 'Good Samaritan' is a story between the lawyer and Jesus. In that story, the lawyer asked Jesus 'who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29). The story challenges us to risk being with the other, reaching out to the

²¹ Pope Francis, (2020). *Fraternity and Social Friendship (FRATELLI TUTTI)*. Vatican City State.

other, listening to what the other expresses both spoken and unspoken and to seeing what the other needs. Our tradition calls this solidarity. It means living in the world as it is. It means moving beyond our self-made worlds and entering the world God gives us.²² In the story of the Good Samaritan, compassion is what sets him for the wounded man who was abandoned on the road (cf. Luke 10:33). Likewise, we are expected to act like the Good Samaritan, to hear the cry of the poor, and the cry of the earth. This means that the climate crisis is a profoundly human and, therefore, a profoundly spiritual crisis.

*Fourth was on care and protection of creation. This is because all in creation is interconnected. If we constantly and attentively listen to the cry of the poor, the vulnerable, and to the cry of creation, which will eventually lead to effective care for the earth, which is our common home, and for our brothers and sisters in need. A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be authentic if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. The *compass* of these social principles, so essential for the growth of a culture of care, also points to the need for relationships between nations to be inspired by fraternity, mutual respect, solidarity and the observance of international law,' concludes Pope Francis. Deep ties binding peoples, 'Our planet is a homeland and humanity is one people living in a common home,' (LS 164), he keeps repeating. Social justice and the well-being of the planet are two sides of the same coin, 'We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one*

²² Dermot Farrell 2021. The Cry of the Earth – The Cry of the Poor. A Pastoral for the Season of Creation: The Climate Catastrophe-Creation's Urgent Call for Change. VERITAS. Archdiocese of Dublin

complex crisis which is both social and environmental.' (LS 139)²³

Conclusion

One may be forced to think or worry how things have deteriorated to this level in our generation. Many of us grew up relating and helping each other in our villages. During weekends, children go to farm both for their parents and for the elderly, especially those without children. And parents encouraged those things. We fetch water and fire-wood for the childless. Parents who are better of prepared meals and shared with their neighbors. Today, this beautiful culture of interconnectedness with one another and with creation has been lost. But our faith as Christians and Catholics through this document offers us a wonderful vision to rekindle these relationships, to renew our childlike sense of awe and respect, wonder and beauty, and thus set out in living the first commandment God gave to us, to be guardians and protectors of this beautiful world, not its polluters and destroyers. We are called to look out to the world and see that, 'soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God'.²⁴

²³ John Paul Pezzi, MCCJ., (2021). "The Cry of the Poor, Laudato Si 2nd Goal". New York, **Jpic-jp.org**, Translated by: Jpic-jp.org. Available at <https://www.joic-jp.org>the-cry-of-the-poor-laudato-si...>

²⁴ Laudato Si, § 84

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