

WITH *LAUDATO SI'* TOWARDS DEEPENING UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ECOLOGY

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Abstract. “Everything is related,” says Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'* (no. 92) to make us ponder upon whether, as academics, we think globally and act locally in the spirit of university social responsibility, including for ecology. The author discusses (i) the nature and reception of the papal document, including by the academia and lawyers; (ii) foreign initiatives aimed to apply the principles highlighted or reiterated by the pope; (iii) the importance of the law in taking care of “our common home;” and (iv) the need for ecological education of those who will make and implement the law. Regrettably, already a tentative query across the universities of the region reveals the absence of or reduced importance attached to the problems of sustainable development and ecology, both in university strategies and curricula. The establishment of a working group on university social responsibility within the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy seems to perpetuate the business understanding of the phenomenon. On top of the many years of experience of foreign academic centres and their networks, discussed briefly by the author, a useful tool facilitating ecological education and a deeper understanding of the social responsibility of the academia in the field of sustainable development can be the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*.

Keywords: *Laudato si'*, ecology, university, social responsibility, education of lawyers

INTRODUCTION

24 May 2015 saw the signature by Pope Francis of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* dedicated to people’s care for their common home. It was published in eight languages (Arabic, German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Polish, and Portuguese) on 18 June 2015.¹

For the correct understanding of the nature and relevance of this document, it enjoys the rank of an encyclical due to its content. *Litterae encyclicae* (Lat.), *encyclos* (Gr.) means a circular, a “circulating” letter. Encyclicals have a general nature and are intended for bishops and the faithful. Since *Pacem in*

¹ Franciscus PP., *Litterae encyclicae Laudato Si'* de communi domo colenda (24.05.2015), AAS 107 (2015), p. 847–945 [hereinafter: LS].

terris by John XXIII, given on 11 April 1964, they have also been addressed to all people of good will around the world, especially when they cover social matters, such as peace, love, or freedom.² The purpose of issuing such documents is to explain Christian teaching, to instruct, to warn against errors and dangerous opinions and actions, but also to invite readers to draw practical conclusions and implement them in practice. On the other hand, jurists and canonists use encyclicals as guidance to interpret and apply canonical norms properly, although these documents do not have a statutory capacity [Sitarz 2008, 27–40]. From the viewpoint of the social doctrine of the Church, encyclicals contribute to the development of law and its application in various domains, such as human rights, penal law, family law, and labour law. Pope Francis himself draws attention to this in *Laudato si'* (LS 65) [Espinoza Coila 2015].

1. A MULTI-FACETED AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE DOCUMENT

The Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* is the first papal document of this rank entirely addressing the area of integral ecology (ecology of the natural environment, political, social, educational, ethical, economic, cultural, mental ecology..., it embraces all of them, like in a single, shared conviction) [Poznański and Jaromi 2016; Gatta 2015]. Undoubtedly, it should be ranked among social encyclicals. Yet, already in *Octogesima adveniens* of 14 May 1971, the apostolic letter of Paul VI, degradation of the environment is referred to as “social problem.”³

Laudato si', as well as a number of related matters, has been widely discussed and commented on across many disciplines and scholarly sessions.⁴ Its sources and inspirations are put to analysis, such as its original South American roots, biblical and Catholic social teaching inspirations, Orthodox and liturgical motifs, Franciscan integral ecology, Ignatian and Jesuit influences [Poznański and Jaromi 2016, 17–161], and philosophical and scientific contexts [ibid., 165–258].⁵

The encyclical is marked by dialogue, including an interreligious one. Following the example of St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis depicts “our

² Ioannis PP. XXIII, Litterae encyclicae *Pacem in terris* (11.04.1964), AAS 55 (1963), p. 258–304.

³ Paulus PP. VI, Epistula apostolica *Octogesima adveniens* (14.05.1971), AAS 63 (1971), p. 401–41; in LS 4, there is a reference to pages 416ff.

⁴ See, for example Yáñez 2017; Silecchia 2016, 371ff. Extensive literature in Note 2; in the Polish literature on the subject, see, for example, conference proceedings Poznański and Jaromi 2016; Figueroa 2016.

⁵ See also Spadaro 2015, 3–22.

common home” as a beautiful mother who opens her arms to hold us, and as a sister with whom we share our life (LS 1, 10–12).⁶ That is why it must be looked at and treated holistically – after all, it is a “common home,” and we are all accountable for it, also before the Creator. To demonstrate that this reflection is not only a Catholic domain, Pope Francis referred to the teachings of Patriarch Bartholomew and his firm statement that “a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.” (LS 8, notes: 15, 16; see LS 9) [Bar 2020, 7–32].

The encyclical also met with a positive reception from groups of Islamic leaders and scholars. They drew attention to the fact that it had been released during Ramadan, interpreting this as a sign of openness and respect, just like Footnote 159 and its reference to an Islamic source, namely the poet, teacher, and mystic of the 16th century Ali al-Khawwas. Although the papal letter does not refer to such fundamental texts as the Quran and the hadith, it is noted that this is a clear attempt to highlight the shared tradition of seeking the truth about the creation as the foundation of moral responsibility for it [Swan 2015; Powell 2017, 1325].⁷ Without rejecting some opposing opinions, Imam Omar points out, “It is my sincere hope that more Muslim scholars will take up the dialogical challenge presented in *Laudato si'* in a comparable spirit of reverence and hospitality with which the 12th-century Muslim leader, Sultan al-Kamil, welcomed Saint Francis of Assisi from whom the current Pope takes his name.”⁸

It should also be noted that the following encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, signed at the tomb of St Francis of Assisi on 3 October 2020 and having an ecological overtone, was inspired, among other things, by *A document on human fraternity for world peace and living together*, signed on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi by His Holiness Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.⁹ Pope Francis confirmed the continuity and

⁶ Pope’s inspiration by the concept of integral ecology is discussed by, for example, Sadowski 2016, 73–89.

⁷ The author points at least to five texts from the Holy Quran, Surahs 59:1; 55:6; 13:13; 17:37; 6:165 and three hadiths [Hadith, in: Sahih Imam Al-Bukhari 24:45; 425], in which the traces and roots of today’s environmentalist movements can be identified. They also contain ideas close to LS: balance, sustainability, moderation, common interest [Powell 2017, 1331–333].

⁸ After: Powell 2017, 1334. Cf. Pope Francis’ address during an interreligious meeting at Ur of the Chaldeans on 6 March 2021; the Polish text available at: “Wyznawcy judaizmu, chrześcijaństwa i islamu w trosce o świat,” <https://swietostworzenia.pl/2-aktualne/925-wyznawcy-judaizmu-chrzescijanstwa-i-islam-u-w-trosce-o-swiat> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

⁹ *A document on human fraternity for world peace and living together*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html [accessed: 05.06.2021]. A vivid response of the Franciscan families to the encyclical globally and in Poland does not come as a surprise. In Poland, it triggered an interdisciplinary review of Pope Francis’ eco-encyclical, as, for example, in the 2016 collective work, *Kościół i nauka w obliczu ekologicznych wyzwań. Źródła, inspiracje i konteksty encykliki*

progress of the idea in his speech during an interreligious meeting at Ur of the Chaldeans on 6 March 2021.¹⁰

Pope's ecological message is also contained in speeches and documents addressed to the representatives of science. For example, during the plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (28 November 2016), by citing no. 53 from *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis emphasized the need for science to be at the service of a global ecological equilibrium. He also called for a renewed partnership between scientists and religious communities in the field of ecology to understand that we are co-operators in protecting and developing the life and biodiversity of the planet and of human life on it. The pope pointed out that it is the duty of scientists, who work free of political, economic, or ideological interests, to develop a cultural model that can help face the crisis of climatic change and its social effects. "Just as the scientific community, through interdisciplinary dialogue, has been able to research and demonstrate our planet's crisis, so too today that same community is called to offer a leadership that provides general and specific solutions [...]"¹¹ This goal was one of the criteria for the reform of universities and ecclesiastical faculties launched by the 2017 Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*.¹²

2. RE-INVITATION TO THE ACADEMIA

During the celebration of the fifth anniversary of publication of *Laudato si'*, the *Laudato Si'* Year was announced (24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021). The aim is to foster eco-development by creating a bottom-up initiative of integral ecology movement for sustainable development, in line with the seven goals of ecological conversion listed in the papal encyclical.¹³ Among them, there is environmental education at every level of school programmes. It was taken

Laudato si', addressing the inspirations and philosophical and scholarly contexts of *Laudato si'* [Poznański and Jaromi 2016]. Among the latest publications, *Czyńcie Ziemię kochaną! Ekologia integralna w perspektywie franciszkańskiej*, ed. Stanisław Jaromi, published in the year of *Laudato si'* by the St Francis of Assisi Environmental Movement (Pol. REFA): The same work contains a study, "40 Years of REFA. An Illustrated History," 9–21. Many scholars participate in such movements, but they are attracted out of passion rather than being urged by their university organization.

¹⁰ Text in Polish: "Wyznawcy judaizmu, chrześcijaństwa i islamu w trosce o świat," <https://swietostworzenia.pl/2-aktualne/925-wyznawcy-judaizmu-chrzescijanstwa-i-islam-u-w-trosce-o-swiat> [accessed: 1 June 2021]. See comment: Wojciechowski 2021, 82–84.

¹¹ See <http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/it/magisterium/francis/28november2016.html> [accessed: 03.06.2021].

¹² See https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco-constituzione-ap_20171208_veritatis-gaudium.html [accessed: 03.06.2021].

¹³ The *Laudato si'* Year programme and its goals resemble the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by the United Nations. The SDG agenda is a framework plan for the global community with 17 goals to be achieved by 2030, covering a number of thematic areas, such as:

into account by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development while drawing up the programme *Laudato si'* Action Platform and inviting universities (but not only) to join this seven-year project. When explaining the programme structure, Fr Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, coordinator of the Ecology and Creation Section of the dicastery, named three milestones to be achieved in the first year of the project: community building, resource sharing, and developing action plans to attain the seven goals of *Laudato si'*. The following five years will see the implementation of specific and practical actions culminating in the final year devoted to thanksgiving.

How and to what extent are we going to respond to this invitation? Undoubtedly, the encyclical reverberated across the universities of Latin America the most, as they are closer to the pope culture- and language-wise. Among them, the International Association of Jesuit Universities in Latin America (AUSJAL) plays a leading role. Established in 1985, it associates 30 universities from 14 countries of the region. It is one of the six regional networks of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU) covering over 200 Jesuit universities.¹⁴ The initiatives of the AUSJAL go beyond university boundaries by seeking ways to contribute to the lives of societies better and to a greater extent. Currently, this network only contains 13 working groups made up of scientists, professionals, and authorities of the member universities who readily participate in the implementation of joint projects, such as a university social responsibility network and an environment and sustainable development network.¹⁵ The programmes pursued include human rights and integral ecology schemes, as well as interdisciplinary education in these fields.

In 2016, a university “common home” network was established in Argentine (Red Universitaria para el Cuidado de la Casa Común). It associates 17 universities and organizes annual thematic weeks. In 2018 they convened the first inter-American interdisciplinary congress.¹⁶

In Europe, from the academic year 2017–2018, students at the pontifical universities in Rome have been able to attend environmental classes structured in six modules and spanning five years of university education. The programme was designed as a response to the appeal conveyed in *Laudato si'* and presented to Pope Francis on 22 June 2017.

Also in Poland, *Laudato si'* has been widely studied and discussed, for example, in a series of conferences, The Integral Ecology of *Laudato si'*. Young Champions of Change (The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków,

poverty, social inequality, peace, hunger, access to clean water, gender equality, clean energy, or climate action.

¹⁴ See <https://iaju.org/about> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

¹⁵ See <https://www.ausjal.org/acerca-de-ausjal/> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

¹⁶ See <https://ruc.unlar.edu.ar/> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

starting from 2016), Sustainable Development and *Laudato Si'* (The Sejm, 15 October 2016), initiatives by the Centre for Ecology and Ecophilosophy of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, interdisciplinary and interuniversity scholarly works, e.g. *Wybrane zagadnienia edukacji ekologicznej. Refleksje wokół Laudato si'*, published in Kraków in 2016; grants by the National Science Centre awarded to the Faculty of Humanities of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University for the project, The Greening of Catholicism in Poland and Italy? Catholic Organizations on Climate Change and Environmental Crisis (2020), or official adoption of environmental policies on campuses, as at the Ignatianum Academy, whose rector, Fr Prof. Józef Bremer, issued a declaration on the academy's environmental policy to celebrate the fifth anniversary of pope's signature of *Laudato si'*.

Evidently, there are numerous, yet dispersed initiatives. It is likely that the *Laudato si'* platform, which is due to launch on 4 October 2021, will put them together and further their development and better understanding, also including the legal sphere which often surfaces in the papal thought.

3. LAUDATO SI' AND LAW

In his 2016 speech to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope Francis addressed the audience as follows, “It has now become essential to create, with your cooperation, a normative system that includes inviolable limits and ensures the protection of ecosystems, before the new forms of power deriving from the techno-economic model causes irreversible harm not only to the environment, but also to our societies, to democracy, to justice and freedom.”¹⁷ In 2019, during an audience with participants of the 20th Congress of the International Association of Penal Law, the Holy Father called for legal protection of the natural environment and recognition of “ecocide” as a crime worldwide, and ensured that the Church would be more involved in this work [Bar 2020, 7–32].

In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis highlights the need for ethics of international relations and the requirement to shape a normative system (no. 58). In Chapter Five, Lines of Approach and Action, he refers to the most relevant international instruments and calls for dialogue on new national and local policies. In other words, each country is to assume its responsibility for planning, coordination, oversight, and enforcement within its respective borders, and for transparency in decision-making (nos 176–183, 186f), which should be fair and free from pressure (no. 183). These processes should be monitored and subject to constant international legal control [Gatta 2015].

¹⁷ <http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/it/magisterium/francis/28november2016.html> [accessed: 03.06.2021].

Indeed, lawyer groups do not remain indifferent about *Laudato si'*. [Fellegara 2016, 17–23] For example, Ángel Ruiz de Apodaca, professor of administrative law at the University of Navarre, is of the opinion that *Laudato si'* is directly linked to environmental protection law, that is, such legal norms and principles that govern those human activities that have (or may have) an adverse impact on nature. He goes so far as to suggest that the encyclical could well serve as a university environmental law coursebook, as it addresses all the current environmental challenges and solutions to be implemented through focusing on “integral ecology.” [Ruiz de Apodaca Espinoza 2016, 145–60; Amo 2019, 5–37]. All would-be and active lawyers should study it because ethical reflection on the relationship between people and the environment precedes the legal one [Tallacchini 1996]. It is not enough to become complacent with an EU directive setting up a legal regime concerning environmental liability.¹⁸ The pope notes that laws may be drafted correctly but often remain a dead letter. The power of law should be regarded as sufficient – to achieve the desired results, people themselves must undergo a change. To ensure intergenerational justice, ecological education is needed more than mere information [Balossi and Prada 2021].

Another noteworthy opinion comes from Judge Jorge Franz, president of Division III of the Court of Appeals in penal cases in Buenos Aires. During the Second World Conference on Constitutional Justice (25–28 August 2015), Judge Franz discussed *Laudato si'* from the legal perspective. He pointed out that environmental law had become a thing of the past and had given way to sustainable development law, especially after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and its declaration. Today’s, novel approach is expected to take account of social, economic, and environmental matters and not just “pollution.”¹⁹ Pope Francis adopts a similar position.

In Poland Piotr Kroczek has carried out an analysis of the sources of legal norms and the functions of law in the area of ecology. Having identified pope’s critical remarks directed at the law, he concludes that “Francis is conversant with legal issues, and his view of the law is very practical” [Kroczek 2015, 55–68].

Undoubtedly, the document may also apply to our legal system. In Sustainable Development Strategy for Poland 2025,²⁰ among the instruments

¹⁸ Directive 2004/35/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage. The consolidated version after the amendment is dated 26 June 2019, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/35/oj> [accessed: 09.06.2021].

¹⁹ “El derecho ambiental pasó a la prehistoria, hoy el enfoque es el derecho del desarrollo sustentable,” *iJudicial*, 2 September 2015, <https://ijudicial.gob.ar/2015/el-derecho-ambiental-paso-a-la-prehistoria-hoy-el-enfoque-es-el-derecho-del-desarrollo-sustentable/> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

²⁰ <http://snep.edu.pl/sms/materialy/strategia%20zrownowazonego%20rozwoju%20polski%20do%20roku%202025.pdf> [accessed: 01.06.2021].

of SD implementation, the authors prioritize education at all school levels (Point 5.5, p. 26) because to implement the principles of such development “set out in the Rio Declaration requires the participation of an informed and well-educated society,” also educated ecologically (Point 2, p. 14). Some of the prerequisites for the effective achievement of the strategy’s objectives are “to facilitate access to justice in matters relating to sustainable development and the use of the environment” (Point 2, p. 14) and “to develop the national legislation that integrates ecological and development aspects” in accordance with Principle 11 of the Rio Declaration (Point 2, p. 14).

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Given the observations made above, a review and verification of university curricula, including of law and administration, is more than advisable. A general query in the universities of the region revealed the absence of or reduced importance attached to the problems of sustainable development and ecology, both in university strategy documents and programmes. Environmental education provided for in the state’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2025 should also be taught outside university establishments focusing on life sciences, biotechnology or paid postgraduate courses.

Sad to say, our country is falling behind in implementing university social responsibility [Bar 2015, 5–18]. If implemented, it is approached through the prism of corporate reality, especially after the recent higher education reforms. The best example of this is the establishment of a working group on university social responsibility within the Task Force for Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility of the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy.²¹

Finally, the signatories of the University Social Responsibility Declaration (2017) were primarily private and vocational schools (23 in total). This confirms the North American experience that university social responsibility is misunderstood and primarily seen as a source of prestige and income generation. Fortunately, two years later, a larger group of state establishments joined in, including those offering law and administration programmes (as many as 60 signatories in 2019). The signatories of the declaration undertake “4) To expand curricula to include business ethics and corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and social innovation.”²²

²¹ See “Społeczna odpowiedzialność – znaczenie dla uczelni i sposoby wdrażania,” a publication prepared for the Congress of Social Responsibility of Science: Science for You (16–17.09.2019), https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/SOU_publicacja.pdf [accessed: 21.06.2021].

²² <https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/grupa-robocza-ds-spolecznej-odpowiedzialnosci-uczelni> [accessed: 21.06.2021].

Besides drawing on the many years of experience of foreign academic centres and their networks, discussed elsewhere, a useful tool facilitating ecological education and a deeper understanding of the social responsibility of the academia in the field of sustainable development can be the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*. They are guided by the principle expressed by an American politician (Timothy Wirth) and elaborated in Pope Francis' letter, "think globally, act locally." The authorities of Lubelskie Voivodeship also expect such action to be taken by the universities of the Lublin region. This is clearly voiced in the Development Strategy of Lubelskie until 2030, which goes with a relevant environmental impact assessment.²³

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²³ <https://strategia.lubelskie.pl/srwl/srwl.2021.04.02.pdf>; <https://strategia.lubelskie.pl/srwl/podsumowanie.soos.2021.04.21.pdf> [accessed: 21.06.2021].

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