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# Natural law foundations of *Laudato Si'*

## Christian principles for ecological policies

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*"As transcendence grows with the terribly ambiguous harvest of deeds, our impact on eternity is for good and for evil: we can build and we can destroy, we can heal and we can hurt, we can nourish and we can starve divinity, we can perfect and we can disfigure its image: and the scars of one are as enduring as the lustre of the other."*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

Over the past decades, discussion has increased over radical environmental changes. The world is grappling with a host of pressing environmental challenges that have been progressively introduced as deserving of immediate attention and action. Just to mention some of these challenges: global warming from fossil fuels, fossil fuel dependence, food waste, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, deforestation, air pollution, melting ice caps, ocean acidification, soil degradation, food and water insecurity (Robinson and Igini 2025).

The Catholic Church articulated its official position on environmental concerns in 2015 with *Laudato Si'*, the encyclical issued by Pope Francis. The document proceeds from the premise that the gravest ecological challenge is anthropogenic climate change, a controversial claim that continues to generate significant debate within scientific circles. This essay does not attempt to evaluate the empirical accuracy of that diagnosis. Instead, it examines the key conceptual contributions of *Laudato Si'* and considers how to avoid serious possible misunderstandings derived from it. Centered on theoretical and conceptual analysis, from this foundation we aim to provide principles that should guide a properly ordered Christian approach to ecological responsibility.

The structure of this research paper is as follows. Section 2 examines the principal contributions of *Laudato Si'*, with particular attention to the concepts of the *common home* and *creation care*. Section 3 addresses potential misinterpretations of the encyclical and outlines the natural-law responses to them; this analysis is further developed by showing how the framework of *imago Dei* overcomes the tension between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and how the notions of the *Christian oikos* and *polis* guard against environmentally driven political radicalism. Section 4 proposes a set of principles and policy suggestions derived from the preceding discussions.

### 2. Main conceptual contributions of *Laudato Si'*

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* represents the most comprehensive articulation of the Catholic Church's vision regarding the environment so far and, from it, two key concepts can be extracted. The first one is understanding Earth as our *common home*. This expression emphasizes that the planet is not solely the dwelling place of humanity, but a shared habitat encompassing all living species (Pope Francis 2015). Our *common home* is the handiwork of God himself and as the Book of Genesis

<sup>1</sup> Hans Jonas: *The Phenomenon of life*. P. 278. Referenced by Franzini Tibaldo 2011.

declares, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”<sup>2</sup> The true gift for mankind, however, lies not merely in the existence of the Earth itself but in humanity’s ability to delight in both its beauty and the abundance of resources it provides. Yet, this enjoyment must be framed within the recognition that creation ultimately belongs to God.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Earth is not a mere resource to be exploited; it is a sacred space where humanity and all creatures participate in a universal communion that reflects divine goodness and harmony.<sup>4</sup>

The second essential concept is implicit in the text, and we will refer to it as *creation care*, which states for humanity’s God-given role as steward of creation. This stewardship is an active moral responsibility that demands conversion of heart, a transformation of our attitudes toward the natural world.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, a method to perform this responsibility is mentioned: “*ecological conversion*,”<sup>6</sup> which means departing from the dangers of anthropocentric domination and the unchecked advance of technocratic paradigms, both of which reduce creation to an object of utility. Instead, *Laudato Si'* calls for an “*ecological spirituality*” that unites environmental care with justice for the poor<sup>7</sup> and respect for human dignity.

All in all, *Laudato Si'* claims that “by developing our individual, God-given capacities, an *ecological conversion* can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God”.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. *Natural Law and Laudato Si'*

Two possible misunderstandings may arise from Pope Francis’ vision. On the one hand, the call to *ecological conversion* and *ecological spirituality* could be misread as a form of pantheistic ecocentrism that blurs the Creator–creature distinction and dismisses the unique nature of the human being. On the other, the emphasis on the plight of the poor according to a universal destination of goods might be erroneously interpreted through the lens of political radicalism or the deviations of “liberation theology” detached from real theological roots.

To overcome such misunderstandings, we begin noticing that at the heart of *Laudato Si'* lies a renewal of the vision first articulated by St. Francis of Assisi in his *Canticle of the Creatures* (Saint Francis of Assisi 1999, 113–114).

For St. Francis, creation was not an abstract theological idea but a living hymn of praise to God, where each element of nature participates as a “brother” or “sister” of mankind in the universal fraternity of creation.<sup>9</sup> The Franciscan vision aims to see the world not as an object for possession, but as a revelation of divine love that deserves gratitude and care.

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1:31.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 67; P 24:1; Deut 10:14; Lev 25:23.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 11, 67, 76, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 48–52.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 216–221.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 25, 30, chapter I, part V.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 220.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: St. Francis Assisi’s hymn: “Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and bears a likeness of you, Most High. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,

However, as G. K. Chesterton insightfully noted, the Catholic tradition stands upon two great foundings, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas, whose complementary perspectives illuminate the faith from different angles (Chesterton 1974, chapter 1). Whereas St. Francis embodies the heart of Christianity, Aquinas, through his understanding of natural law, represents its reason, grounding faith in the rational structure of natural and divine law. Together, they provide the theological balance necessary for an authentic *ecological spirituality*, one that integrates affective reverence for creation with moral discernment oriented to the seeking of truth.

The pantheistic misunderstanding is explicitly denounced and rejected in *Laudato Si'*, however, the overwhelming amount of misanthropic and pessimistic narratives in current ecological activism makes it necessary to elaborate more in this so no room for doubt is allowed.

Natural law tradition affirms that human beings are rational animals, endowed with intellect and free will, establishing a clear ontological distinction between humanity and the rest of creation. Through the complementary concept of *imago Dei*, the theological stance that every person bears the image of God, human dignity is affirmed as unique among creatures, reflecting both participation in and distinction from the created order while also departing from the radical anthropocentric view.

The radical activism misunderstanding is less clearly dismissed in the encyclical, as the document frequently denounces the exploitative system sustained by the global economic elites, which can be interpreted as a call for joining radical anticapitalistic and extreme-left forces, which are usually involved in environmental activism.

Natural law, in this sense, corrects any drift toward radical activism by reorienting moral and political action toward the common good, which stands above individual or partisan interests. In contrast to ideologies that prioritize conflict or revolution, the natural law tradition understands the political community (*polis*) as ordered to justice, peace, and the flourishing of all. History repeatedly shows that when zeal for reform abandons such moral and rational foundations, it tends to degenerate into tyranny and misery. We propose in this sense the complementary notion of *Christian oikos* as the root by which effective political action can be taken without revolutionary distortions.

### 3.1. Overcoming anthropocentrism and ecocentrism through *Imago Dei*

We must distinguish between different approaches concerning the place and duty of human beings' place in the created world. Firstly, we will reflect on anthropocentrism and its distinct approach. Then, we will reflect on contemporary ecocentrism, which contradicts the anthropocentric ethical framework, extending ethics to nature itself, and challenging also Christian anthropology.

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in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong." Cf. Pope Francis 2015, 87.

To resolve the tension between the two concepts we turn to the Christian concept of *imago Dei*, which offers us a transcendent perspective that sublimates the ontological problems of ecocentrism while also correcting the practical deviations of anthropocentrism.

### *Anthropocentrism*

Anthropocentrism is a philosophical position and an ethical worldview which states that human beings are not just separate from the world but also the center of it. This distinguished role would be recognized both in the Christian tradition and in the classic and modern secular theories of law; indeed, authors such as Lynn White (1967, 1203–1207) state that the degradation of the surrounding world that is consequence of anthropocentrism is caused primary by the human nature honored by Christianity itself.

Currently, humanities scholars and social scientists distinguish between different levels of anthropocentrism, for instance Bryan G. Norton (1984, 131–148) considers the existence of both *strong anthropocentrism* and *weak anthropocentrism* (see “Environmental Ethics” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Being anthropocentric in a strong sense means that we assign intrinsic value only to human beings, while being human centered in a weak sense means that we assign greater amount of value to human beings than to other life forms<sup>10</sup> and all moral duties we have towards them can be derived from “the realization that these ecosystems constitute the ‘life-support system’ for humans.”<sup>11</sup> In this regard, critiques of anthropocentrism as a whole state that such position is the root of “speciesism and human chauvinism” (Kopnina et al. 2018, 111).

*Strong anthropocentrism* assumes that only humans have a sense of moral or intrinsic value. Thus, protecting and caring for other beings or the environment comes from a utilitarian standpoint. If it benefits us, then it is worth doing. In contrast, *weak anthropocentrism* maintains the distinguished role of human beings but also suggests that nonhumans are also part of morality, not in the center, but in the periphery.<sup>12</sup> The main difference between *strong* and *weak anthropocentrism* is that the latter’s arguments do not need to be selfish or shallow and takes into consideration the well-being of future generations, but in the two of them remains a consequentialist and utilitarian perspective.

In conclusion, anthropocentrism can ground environmental protection policies because human welfare depends on the sound functioning of natural systems. How strong these environmental policies will be depended on (1) how closely human and nonhuman welfare is tied and (2) to what extent humans can modify natural systems while ensuring that they continue to provide life-support for humans (see *The Question of Moral Standing or Intrinsic Value and the Anthropocentric Answer*).

### *Ecocentrism*

The foundation of modern ecocentrism is rooted in Aldo Leopold’s *The Land Ethic* (Leopold 1949). The essence of Land ethics is the introduction of a new moral perspective that, on the one hand, expands the concept of community, meaning that ethics includes now not only humanity, but also many other species, plants and ecosystems living on Earth. On the other hand, this approach radically changes man’s relation to himself, as he is no longer the “lord of the Earth” but just one

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See more: Norton 1984, 135.

of the citizens of the entire community of life. From this holistic point of view, the ontological difference between humans and other living beings begins to blur.

According to the author, this expanded understanding of ethics is necessary because humans, due to their ability to make tools, have interfered with slow and small-scale evolutionary processes to such an extent that they have upset the balance of natural processes. Unlike other living beings, the human species has made itself independent of the complex structure of nature. However, this sense of independence has now reached such an extent that nature conservation strategies are only developed if the economic arguments are sufficiently convincing.

Expanding this thought, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss proposed the frameworks of eco-philosophy and deep ecology, which are at the roots of mainstream ecological activism. Næss stated that the relationship between humans and the world surrounding them is not ethical but ontological in nature (see Næss 2000, 65). Based on this, the main task thus is to rethink or redefine both human nature and human relationship with nature. Deep ecology, in this sense, tends to erase any hierarchical relation between man and nature.

Finally, postmodern theory has completed the circle by promoting the use of the concept “*Anthropocene*,” coined by Paul J. Crutzen. This idea states that the era of human intervention in nature should be considered a particular geological age. This notion has been framed into radical ecological pessimism, the idea of imminent disaster because of the perpetuation of an ontological distinction between man and nature. In this sense, the culmination of this school of thought, regarding such idea of an *Anthropocene*, postulates that “Although it began with us, it will most likely end without us: the Anthropocene will only give way to another geological epoch long after we have disappeared from the face of the Earth” (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2025).

#### *Resolving the tension: Imago Dei as the foundation for creation care*

From a Christian perspective, *strong anthropocentrism* errs by collapsing all intrinsic value into the human sphere, thereby denying the real, poetic goodness of nonhuman beings and encouraging an instrumental, utilitarian, and ultimately materialistic domination of nature. *Weak anthropocentrism*, though more balanced, still reduces moral concern for creation to human self-interest and thus fails to recognize the inherent teleology and dignity embedded in natural entities themselves.

Mainstream ecocentrism makes the mistake of blurring the ontological distinction between humans and other creatures, risking the promotion of a pantheistic and materialist view that undermines the special moral responsibility of rational beings. Finally, radical-pessimistic ecocentrism denies any possibility of rational stewardship leading even to misanthropy, which completely opposes Christian ethics.

Instead, we propose to go back to the doctrine of *imago Dei* to overcome this false dichotomy between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and provide foundation for *creation care*. The origin of *imago Dei* is rooted in the Bible passage that specifically states that “God created mankind in his own image.”<sup>13</sup> To be created in the image of God means to exist primarily in relationship-with God, then with others in the light of God, and with the God created world itself. The uniqueness of human beings is that we mirror the divine through love and care, and this explains that human

<sup>13</sup> Gen 1:27.

beings are not only responsible for safeguarding humanity, but the rest of creation, because humans are “entrusted with the divine project to care for creation” (Settimo 2023, 870).

The human being, by virtue of rationality, freedom, and relational capacity, reflects the Creator in a way that grounds a distinctive moral vocation that is accomplished through natural law. Because humans uniquely image God, their practical reason is ordered toward discerning and promoting the flourishing of all created goods according to their natures, this way it can be fully understood when Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'* that “human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.”<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, the same rule that applies for positive human law, that must reflect eternal law, is applied to the general behavior and attitudes mankind must have in relation to nature. This way, natural law sees human distinctiveness as functional and relational: humans image God precisely by exercising reason both when taking benefit and protecting the integrity of creation. Through this logic, the human being’s special status is that of servants or mediators and not of merely slaves or masters.

Thus, the ontological vision highlighted in *Laudato Si'* resonates because it restores the relational vocation proper to those who bear God’s image. When Pope Francis insists that “everything is interconnected”<sup>15</sup> and “it cannot be emphasized enough how”<sup>16</sup> he is not collapsing human uniqueness into nature but rejecting the dualistic and materialistic habit of seeing ourselves as detached observers or exploiters of creation.

When *Laudato Si'* calls for an ‘ecological conversion’<sup>17</sup> it is very much compatible to a recovered sense of being in relationship with God, other humans and surrounding world. We must remember that our dignity as the image of God is fulfilled completely only when we live in harmony with the world God has made. If we do the opposite and we disrupt harmony with materialistic, utilitarian or pessimistic arguments, then “we can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality: peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism.”<sup>18</sup>

*Laudato Si'* points out that today’s man must “develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments.”<sup>19</sup> In a metaphysical sense this has an incredible significance for it is the opportunity to confront the extended anti-Christian perspectives that are usually involved in the ecologist debate.

*Strong anthropocentrism* is clearly rejected not only in *Laudato Si'*, but also from understanding the *imago Dei* doctrine according to natural law, so any accusation to blame Christianity for being at the roots of this stance proves to be unfair. Humans, precisely because they bear God’s image, are

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 138.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 216–221.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis 2015, 121.

called to recognize and protect the intrinsic goodness of every creature, exercising authority as stewardship rather than dominion.

*Weak anthropocentrism* can fairly be confused with the Christian perspective; however, its failure lies on its purely secular and instrumental vision of nature, and Christian ethics are opposed to any framework that is ambiguous regarding moral considerations. Care for ecosystems is not merely prudential, but a genuine moral duty grounded in the real ends and flourishing of nonhuman creatures.

Mainstream ecocentrism is met not simply by pointing out its leveling of all life-forms but by affirming a proper hierarchy of being: the human person has a unique relational vocation within creation, not to dominate but to serve as a responsible mediator whose rationality and freedom are ordered to the good of the whole. *Imago Dei* defends a special ontological difference between rational and non-rational beings, and that does not imply the first ones degrading the latter.

Radical-pessimist ecocentrism, finally, is answered not only by rejecting its fatalism but by proposing that humans possess the capacity and mandate to restore ecological harmony, integrating peace, justice, and care for creation into a unified moral project in which human flourishing and the flourishing of the natural world are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. This idea is also sustained by the existence of a common teleology of all beings and creation according to a transcendental principle, which is denied by such pessimism.

Coming from the Jewish tradition, the philosopher Hans Jonas indicates that “thanks to human beings, God’s creation may continue its worldly adventure” (Franzini Tibaldo 2011). And to properly defend this idea, the first task is recognizing the ontological shift from theocentrism turned to secular anthropocentrism and then to materialism and pessimism. Having drifted away from the transcendent, our world today seems so far from divinity, that everything that is beyond physics is viewed only as mere *flatus vocis*.<sup>20</sup> Thus, modern human beings “suffer from an existential loss of meaning, which deposes the images and metaphors traditionally used to express his specific identity.”<sup>21</sup> This specific identity lost its root, the human dignity granted by God to all man. Understanding human dignity without transcendent elements creates circular arguments which are pointing to unstable and changeable grounds.

In conclusion, the doctrine of *imago Dei* provides the most fundamental theological basis for *creation care*. The distinctive dignity of man does not separate humanity from the rest of creation but situates it within creation as its responsible guardian. Because humans alone possess the capacity to discern moral order and act prudently for the good of others, they are entrusted with a vocation of stewardship that mirrors God’s own providential care. Thus, *creation care* is not a mere addendum but an intrinsic dimension of what it means to be human: to image God is to exercise a form of authority that is ordered to service, protection, and flourishing of all that God has made.

### 3.2. Overcoming revolutionary deviations through Christian oikos

There appears to be a persistent difficulty in the political reception of Pope Francis’s message, not only in *Laudato Si'* but throughout his wider teaching and pontificate. Because his critiques often

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

target the excesses of the capitalist system, some interpreters have regarded his views as heirs to the Latin American currents of radical social thought, most notably the extremist liberation theology,<sup>22</sup> which reduces the Gospel primarily to a political struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed, denying the spiritual and transcendent dimension of Christianity (Sánchez Rojas n. d.).

From this standpoint, *Laudato Si'* might be assumed to imply political conclusions that the text itself does not explicitly draw, leaving room for certain forms of radical ecological activism, which frequently aligns with the ecocentrist perspectives previously discussed; perspectives that are not only anti-Christian in principle, but also often support political models such as socialism or communism, which neglect natural law, the common good, and the Christian understanding of the human person.

To avoid this misreading, it is necessary to clarify how the moral call to *ecological conversion* can give rise to political obligations that remain faithful to natural law and genuinely serve the common good. For this reason, we propose grounding the practical implications of *Laudato Si'* in a more robust conceptual foundation: the idea of a *Christian oikos*, by which nations can take care of their own common household and, at the same time, of the creation. This way, mankind can exercise responsible care and prudential governance of the world God has entrusted to us.

In its most fundamental form, human life unfolds within an *oikos* (οἶκος), commonly translated as “household,” which should not be understood only as a domestic arrangement grounded in family bonds, but as the foundational unit of human existence, the original locus where nature and community converge.<sup>23</sup> Within it, a shared purpose unites its members, and through the light of Christian revelation, this purpose acquires a transcendent dimension. The *Christian oikos* thus emerges as a spiritual fellowship (Fernández and Vidal 1995; Conradie 2007) oriented toward the individual attainment of *beatitudo* by all its members, this is the blessed happiness derived from the full realization of one’s potential through virtuous living and harmony with the divine order (Copleston 2010).

The structure of every *oikos* is defined by the dynamic relationship between *physis* (φύσις) and *nomos* (νόμος), that is, between the material foundations of life, where nature and human activity interact, and the immaterial dimension of meaning, which is rational and spiritual, and materializes as a notion of human order (Berbieri 2011). While *physis* provides the substratum of existence, *nomos* gives it form and direction according to the communal purpose. In this sense, the *Christian oikos* recognizes that what God creates as *physis*, man administers as *nomos*, under the guidance of Divine Law.

In historical terms, the early *oikos* evolved beyond its original kinship base. Families and clans, bound by shared labor and common land, began to associate with others who shared their language, customs, and collective memory (Morgan 1985; Aristóteles 1988). From this web of associations emerged the nation, a natural extension of the *oikos* (Herder 2024; Lira 1948). In this way, the *oikos* serves as the formative matrix of broader social realities, so the habits, solidarity, shared culture,

<sup>22</sup> For instance, some state that Pope Francis' pontificate has been way more open to liberation theology than his predecessors who condemned it. See Tamayo 2025. We can also see efforts by the Pope himself to take distance from it. See Sánchez Silva 2022.

<sup>23</sup> See more: “Oikos” in *Philosophy Dictionary of Arguments*; Johnson 1998.

and moral order that were once domestic become the foundations of national identity. Thus, from the *Christian oikos* arise Christian nations, sustained by both *physis* (their land and ancestry) and *nomos* (their shared law, Christian tradition, and moral order).

The *polis* ( $\pi\circ\lambda\iota\varsigma$ ), or political community, can be seen as the institutional maturation of the *oikos* and the nation. Just as the household requires governance, distribution, and order, so too the *polis* extends these same functions to the scale of the national level. In this way, the *oikos*, nation, and *polis* together form a continuum, a balanced mean between the isolation of the individual and the abstraction of a borderless universalism.

A *Christian polis* is founded upon the same principles that define the *Christian oikos*, though expressed on a different scale. *Physis* remains the sustaining material basis of political life, providing the resources upon which both *oikos* and *polis* depend. *Nomos*, in turn, ensures their proper management and finds its fullest expression in natural law, which articulates the moral principles by which the polity is rightly ordered toward the common good (Saint Thomas Aquinas 2010).

Following this line of thought, the *Christian polis*, as an extension of the *Christian oikos*, bears the duty of stewardship over its *physis* through cultivation, conservation, and prudent administration. This stewardship is not merely a technical necessity but a moral obligation. To govern well is to order the gifts of nature according to the measure of reason and in the light of divine harmony.

Three conclusions follow. First, because the *polis* is the institutional maturation of the *Christian oikos*, it possesses both the authority and the obligation to protect and order its own *physis*, its land, resources, and ecological foundations, in a manner that is sovereign, grounded in natural law, and respectful of the principle of subsidiarity.

Second, any environmental protection guided by ecocentrism premises is incompatible with natural law, for it collapses the necessary distinction between *nomos* and *physis*, thereby denying the unique rational agency through which the human person, as *imago Dei*, is called to steward creation.

Third, any revolutionary or radically driven attempt to impose ecological responsibility following premises of socialism or communism violates natural law because it disregards subsidiarity, bypassing the organic authority of families, local communities, and the nation, and replacing them with coercive structures detached from the *oikos*. Authentic ecological stewardship must therefore arise from the natural hierarchy of social life.

In conclusion, a *Christian polis* sustained on a *Christian oikos* must indeed regard *creation care* as a fundamental obligation, as it materializes the proper human way of living in the *common home* (understood as *physis*); yet this duty must remain firmly rooted in the transcendent moral order that natural law affirms. Detached from these foundations, as in the deviations that are characteristic of liberation theology and similar doctrines, ecological concern is easily stripped of its spiritual depth and ultimately bent toward forms of tyranny that disrupt the organic continuity between family, community, nation, and *polis* and, ultimately, undermine the common good.

#### 4. Principles and suggestions for Creation Care

By now, the reader should have understood that *creation care* is a complex approach to our God given world and ourselves. We explored this approach through the lenses of *Imago Dei* and *Christian oikos*, which also seek to facilitate a natural law interpretation of *Laudato Si'*. After this, it becomes

necessary to discuss the practical implications of these principles. However, a question may arise: what is the point of theory if, in most cases, the practical side can stand on its own? As a social scientist, Kurt Lewin once said: “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (Levin 1951, quoted by Lundberg 2004, 7) or as Aristotle believed that the highest form of knowledge is insight. If we could understand that:

*“the quality and nature of our ideas and the knowledge they create makes a positive difference in guiding what we do, then understanding what constitutes quality thinking]and theorizing would seem to be very, very useful indeed. By clarifying how we know, what we know.”*<sup>24</sup>

(1) The first principle is the enhancement of education on *creation care*, grounded in a strong sense of human dignity. Political communities should (and indeed must) recognize their moral responsibility toward future generations. International human rights law offers only limited protection for the interests of those future generations; therefore, local governance and community structures remain the heart of effective environmental change, which must be culturally embedded. In this sense, a proper *ecological conversion* in education should include: a) a theocentric vision of creation; b) an understanding of the importance of humankind, both as creatures deserving care and as the species entrusted with an exceptional role of stewardship; and c) an appreciation of the significance of other creatures and elements of nature, from which it is legitimate for humanity to take what is necessary to live well, though always from an ethical perspective.

(2) The second principle is the balance between the local and the national. The common good of a *Christian oikos* and *polis* requires that the state and political communities, guided by the principle of subsidiarity, establish local institutional frameworks that recognize and support the specific conditions, needs, and solutions related to environmental issues, constituting a bottom-up application of *creation care*. At the same time, the state must administer and regulate a broader equilibrium of needs and initiatives, drawing on its authority to uphold the common good of the whole; this represents the top-down dimension of *creation care*. In this regard, balance is essential, mirroring the relationship between *oikos* and *polis*. Consistent with the previous principle, the implementation of ecological responsibility in education must therefore account for both local particularities and national priorities.

(3) The third principle is the development of an ecological diplomacy that addresses real problems through good will among nations and with full respect for national sovereignty. This principle responds to the frequent objection that sovereign approaches to environmental crises are insufficient, given the global and transnational nature of many ecological challenges. From the perspective of the *Christian oikos*, however, the common good is most effectively pursued within communities that have naturally evolved from *oikos* to nation and *polis*. Thus, when two or more nations, each rooted in distinct original *oikoi*, enter into dialogue over environmental issues that affect one or more of the parties, such engagement must be grounded in mutual good will and a firm respect for each nation’s sovereignty. This form of diplomacy does not exclude arbitration by third parties or the involvement of specialized international institutions, provided that such bodies act in genuine service of the common good at stake.

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<sup>24</sup> Lundberg, *ibid.*

It is important to highlight that *creation care* overcomes anthropocentrism and ecocentrism precisely because *imago Dei* is rooted on a theocentric view, only this way *Laudato Si'* can be interpreted in a way that transcends the limited and ambiguous secular proposals for the issue such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) suggested by the United Nations.

In this sense, professor János Zlinszky illustrated at a conference<sup>25</sup> the most relevant parallels between *Laudato Si'* and the SDG, and we can see some of them related to the first two principles that we mentioned. For instance, regarding *ecological conversion* and education we see the idea of protection of cultural heritage (*LS* 143 – SDG 11); replacement of the culture of wastefulness (*LS* 22 – SDG 12); reduction of consumption (*LS* 22 – SDG 9, 12); and enforcement of intergenerational justice and healing the structure of society (*LS* 50–52, 95 – SDG 10). On the other hand, regarding the balance between subsidiarity and state action, parallels can be seen in creating better governance practices and ensuring transparency and social participation (*LS* 189, 196–198 – SDG 16, 17); and introducing a new economic paradigm that serves the common good, the capacity for peaceful cooperation, and the security of individuals and communities (*LS* 53–56 – SDG 16, 17).

However, if we only remain with the language and approach of the SDG, we are at risk of falling in the deviations of ecocentrism and revolutionary political attitudes that end up harming human dignity and common good. This is the reason why the transcendental perspective that comes with natural law is necessary to avoid such mistakes and guide a proper Christian response to the issue.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper gives an account of *creation care* and its natural law foundations as the proper way to understand and apply the *Laudato Si'* encyclical. Our research underlined the importance of *imago Dei* and the *Christian oikos* in order to avoid misunderstandings on the Church position on environmental issues, which might mislead into pantheistic ecocentrism and revolutionary political positions.

With deep analysis of both principles, we aimed to the task God has given us by making humankind to his image, and this responsibility is not only relational to other human beings, but to our whole world. Taking God's will into account, we must recognize our duty to protect His created world as He wanted us: living in harmony with our fellow human beings and the rest of the species and natural elements of the planet.

In sum, it is our duty to protect harmony as we are the stewards of the Earth, because “all the earth is the Lord's and on them he has set the world in order.” Degrading the world, thus, means we degrade His creation. These directions show us how *creation care* can be present in political life without abandoning the theological foundations which give meaning and aim to our earthly life. This is the way human beings can be in harmony with each other and with the created world, but most importantly with the Creator Himself.

<sup>25</sup> “Paths to caring for our shared home” – Kerkai conference on the feasibility of comprehensive ecology. November 29, 2025. Professor János Zlinszky's presentation on the “Connections and opportunities of a strategy based on comprehensive ecological thinking, aligned with global and local community strategic directions.”

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