

Ensuring Integral Ecological Sustainability for Integral Human Development in Francis' *'Laudato Si'*

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Abstract

Social inclusiveness in relation to global demands for Integral Ecological Sustainability (IES) indicates common human responsibility and concern in the building up of environmental home, as a common heritage, that will healthily accommodate every individual, irrespective of his or her social status. Such is the philosophical conviction that orchestrated the issuing of the social encyclical: *Laudato Si*, by Pope Francis. It is a social encyclical that has considered the possibilities of integral humanism through genuine 'personalism' of the environment. This socio-political text for reconstruction and re-engineering of human social consciousness in making the environment as our "Common Home" presupposes the possibilities of global social order, when man and environment are indispensably evaluated as one entity which glorifies the creative power of nature. This paper recognises the importance of *Laudato Si*, postulating that when every individual as a person takes the environment as its very self, such gesture will engineer the culture of common good and solidarity of purposes. Such common responsibility and consciousness for IES will indispensably engineer a global social order and development

Keywords: common environment, integral human development, *laudato si*, humanity, integral ecological sustainability.

An introductory note

Ecological-theistic thinkers convincingly posit that seeing God in everything in nature will leave more to be desired. For the environment is one of those things that reflect the indispensable belief on the existence of the divine, and such interpret the nature of the relationship it has with the mundane. This however, should be distinguished from Pantheism, which is the belief that God exists in everything. Thus, seeing God in nature, as many social philosophers and theologians such as Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have asserted in some social encyclicals, accentuate the proper placement of humans in nature, especially as stewards of the environment that houses them. Consequently, the protection of the environment, according to Francis' *Laudato Si*, is about the sustainability of "Human Family". That is, a conviction that the care of the

environment determines the quality and quantity of living that humanity possesses. For this, Francis (2015) recognises that;

When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem (no. 139).

As a matter of fact, this conviction necessarily moves for the examination of the conceptual understanding and pragmatic impulses in the quest for 'integral ecological sustainability'; as it relates to moral demands for ethical principles in maintaining normal conditions of ecological habitation. This is true because, the ethics of the environment reminds humanities that what is injurious to the environment is that which is injurious to humanity (cf, Ekiugbo and Isanbor, 2013, 27). Also, the doctrine of common environment indicates that the principle of human commonness is a condition where every human individual within common web of interests for common development must necessarily exist within the confines of common authenticity (Cf, Aghawenu 2016, 28-39). And such common authenticity helps humanities to recognise the fact that the death of the environment is the death of the human family.

On this note, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* dated on the 18th June, 2015 is a contemporary call for environmental safety and on the recognition of the valuation of integral ecology for the realization of “Integral Human Development”, and ultimately, respecting the environment as our “Common Home”. It is also noteworthy that the concern of this encyclical is beyond the adherents of Catholicism; it is a universal call for environmental safety and sustainability. It is also the consideration of the environment as a “Common Home”, as an indication of the workability of human “common good” to safeguard and sustain universal human existence. From this, *Laudato Si* indicates the following:

- i. It calls for the spirit of simplicity in human lifestyles.
- ii. It encourages the development of eco-spirituality, a practice that sees the praise of God's wholesomeness in natural harmony and serenity.
- iii. It adjudicates for eco-justice towards the attainment of interior peace and order, the management of common heritage of mankind.

- iv. To be human with nature, and to be holy in safeguarding it- that is, integral ecology for integral human development.

What then is the rationale behind Francis' *Laudato Si'*? It is about a responsive and responsible recognition that humankind is an intrinsic part of the ecology, and the ecology, in return, is an intrinsic part of humanity. It is about ontological consciousness of man as person who has been endowed with rationality and intelligibility to safeguard his life and the lives of other ontological organisms. Such concern also expects that man should see his very self as a change agent for ecological recovering and revamping when there are depletions of the environment. Man as a subject of lived-experiences and as a rational agent of morality should recognise the fact that the environment is his very home. Even as a home, he cannot monopolise it, for it belong to everybody, not for somebody. At such, he should take proper and adequate responsibility towards the management of his very actions and freedom in safeguarding the environment as a "common home."

On the eco-centric concern of *Laudato Si'*

For Pope Francis; "when we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it" (Francis 2015, no.139). This is on the fact that "nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are actually part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (Francis 2015, no. 139). Notwithstanding, such interaction of nature with the society must be healthily comforting, distinctly accommodating, and consistently holistic to making the environment a home for every human family.

At the global level however, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. For, a very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system" (Francis 2015, no. 23). Thus, according to Njoku (2013). "...the role of government is to moderate the various rights of people and ensure that individual rights do not infringe on each other and on the common good" (85).

The religious communities are also supposed to champion the courses of the environment as the common good in order to safeguard or rescue humanity from the weight of self-extinction. On this, Francis appeals that; "the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole Human Family together to seek sustainable integral human development, for we know that things can change.... Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home..." (Francis 2015, no.13). From this assertion, it is clearly indicated that the developmental serenity of the future

generation lies on the proper management of human ingenuity and intelligibility. For humanity is the beauty of the environment, the beauty of creation. This implies that the philosophical religiosity, where, for instance, the Igbo cultural *Nwa*-ontology will refer "humanity" as "mmadu", meaning "the beauty of life." Life in this context signifies "the ecological semblance", that is, "the whole of creation." This is the culture or reality of "Mmadu-cology" which embodies the stewardship of "all that is."

Understandably, the philosophical metamorphosis of *Nwa* to the *Nwa*-ontology in Pantaleon Iroegbu's reflection on human dignity in Igbo cultural philosophy, indicates oneness of humanities. In it, Iroegbu (1994) asserts that "the entirety of existence, from God the highest of Being to inanimate beings of our cosmos can be summarised in the en-globing concept of the Igbo term, *Uwa*. *Uwa* is all-inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, and reality; it en-globes all that is: animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal, and global. It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and perspective..." (Iroegbu 1994, 144, see, Anah 2005, 154). Consequently, humanity must contemporarily intensify efforts to protect the life that lies and lives in the future. For this, Francis recognises that;

Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded (Francis 2015, no.13).

To start with, the quest for integral human development can never be distanced from the safe environment, a common home of humanity. Thus, Pope Francis recognises that it is only when the environment is healthy that humanity will be healthy as well. Generally, when one talks about environmental and ecological development in the context of contemporary human scientific and technological advancements, we are not trying to be one-sided in evaluation, but that the proper agitation of integral ecological sustainability for the attainment of integral human development, and then every evaluation is made to their applications, especially nuclear and military technologies. Thus, Francis asserts, "our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (2015, no.19).

With its biblical and textual presentations, *Laudato Si* posits that any development agitated for, must be for the common good of the people of the

world (Isanbor 2014, 101; Isanbor, Okoro and Ayetin 2015, 170). Anything contrary to it is a natural aberration. Hence, it is on recognition of this fact that the death of environment is the death of humanity; that Francis issued *Laudato Si* (On the Care for our Common Home) as a contemporary call for environmental safety. Consequently, it is in safeguarding the environment that integral human development can be realised, a culture of development so advocated by Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Though, Paul VI attributed the survival of humankind to the sustainability of the value of peace in the pursuance of integral human development, since, it is taken the quest for peace is enliven in the protection of the environment. The consideration of the environment as a "common Home" is an indication of the workability of human "common good" to safeguard and sustain existence.

The thrust of collective fears and anxieties on environmental degradation

The high quest for development in contemporary society has being both positive and negative in terms of the management of innovative freedom. For instance, contemporary scientific, technological and industrializing developmental culture has exacted a lot of anxieties on the possibilities for the extinction of the human family through environmental degradation, if proper and regulatory checks are not done about its misgivings. Francis' *Laudato Si* recognises this threat to humanity. Thus, environmentalists throughout the world continue to decry the abuse of the environment. However, despite these cries, the world has experienced and is still experiencing environmental degradation which results into disasters throughout in many regions of human habitation (Adelakun 2008, 223). Thus, the social doctrine or advocacy of integral ecological sustainability recognises the indisputable fact that humanity is just a part of the environment that must live to rationally care of the rest of creation in wholeness. Before now, John Paul II (1991) admits that "although people are rightly worried; though much less than they should be; about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic "human ecology" (no. 38)..

More factually, the world is in state of environmental disarray, by industrial and nuclear wastes. A state in which living organisms can no longer survive on their natural habitat because the abiotic support has been damaged in the name of economic and social development (Bello, 2012, 123). For Francis;

The earth's resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for

food but also for curing disease and other uses. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems (Francis 2015, 32).

With this development, we have been making death to be very cheap and accessible without its usual apprehension. Also, poverty, violence and pains are so realistic and factually welcoming and insurmountable. These realities have been termed to have become the middle names of most developing and underdeveloped parts of the world, without rumours and rejects. This is because, according to a great philosopher Heterophiles, "when health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself: art cannot become manifest; strength cannot be exerted; wealth is useless and reason is powerless." Then, the whole of humanity needs re-examination and re-introspection of interests and desires.

It is interesting to also note that all these environmental fallouts have been observed to be as a result of the quests of competitive development and advancement that have been evaluated to be ironical and cynical, undermining the rights and dignity of the human person. Now, the natures and types of development of which man seeks are greatly questioned. This is because there can be developments that are detrimental to the well-being of humanity, especially those ones that are associated with pollutions of common heritage of mankind, through radioactive emissions, gas inflammations and the likes, that cause human diseases, illnesses, and even natural disasters. These are violence against natures (cf, Ekanola 2005, 100; Dimkpa 2013, 60). And ultimately, remain the very concerns to be adequately monitored towards the attainment of integral human development.

Global consideration of integral ecological sustainability

The philosophical doctrine of integral ecological sustainability concerns the safeguarding of the environment for all humans and non-humans. The environmental hazards are basically of two types: the traditional environmental hazards which arise due to basic human existence, and include problems associated with water, sanitation and solid waste disposal; and modern environmental hazards, resulting from rapid human development, without health and environmental safeguards; and the unsustainable consumption of the earth's natural resources.

More clearly, we are very much familiar with the modern environmental hazards because of their affective nature in negativity. For Adelokun, global warming poses one of the greatest environmental problems to the earth. It is, by definition, he posits is "the increase in the average temperature of the Earth's near surface air and oceans in recent decades and its projected continuation" (p. 222). It has been noted too that since the time of Industrial Revolution, human

beings have been extracting and burning fossil fuels at increasing rates and equally releasing huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The effect of this is what is globally known as “global warming.” It can be regarded as the hallmark of environmental problems that demands the fastest embrace of environmental safety and friendliness.

Consequently, the environmental awakening of human social responsibilities, Anyanwu (2011) recognises that “contemporary ecological consciousness” (p. 120) should border on:

1. How to maintain equilibrium in the ecosystem,
2. How to remedy the harm that has already been done to the intricate network of organic and inorganic relationship in nature, and
3. How to present future causes of ecological imbalance such as ecocide, eco-catastrophe, eco-metabolic, eco-pathogenic, and eco-political and eco-theological disequilibrium.

Common good, common environment and common humanity

The proper understanding of human ecology is to bring to the fore the contemporary appreciation of the doctrine and the philosophy of “Common Good”, situates the placement of the otherness of development in the management of environmental resources (see, Isanbor, Okoro and Ayetin 2015, 170). The realization of the environment as “Common Home” is possible when the destruction of the ecosystem is morally fenced out with the weighty adoption of the doctrine of “Common Good.” To achieve this, we must learn to obey the laws of nature, which by divine providence, have been keeping the universe in existence and helping to keep it in balance.

We seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning. “This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibriums existing between the creatures of this world...” (Francis 2015, no. 68). All these are about the call for environmental friendliness, adaption and socialisation, and with the consciousness in sipping the importance of nature. It is about the change of human mentality toward positive and humanised development; therefore, we must be prepared to take on new functions and new duties in every sector of human activities and especially in the sectors of world society if justice and peace are really to be put into practice. On this, Francis admonishes that;

The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we

burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others (Francis 2015, no. 95).

More so, at the global level, UNO's involvement and conscious commitment have shown that the attainment of peace and justice is possible, coping with the demanded cooperation from the members' States, to making sure that human life, rights and dignity respected, promoted and protected, especially through proper management and distributions of natural resources. It must be acknowledged therefore, that UNO, even with limitations and delays due in great part to the failures of its members, has made notable contributions to the promotion of respect for human dignity, the freedom of peoples and the requirements of development; thus preparing the cultural and institutional soil for the building of peace (John Paul II 2004, no. 4). Although the organisation recognises that humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development, it needs a greater degree of international ordering (John Paul II 1987, no. 43). Individual States or members must therefore try to adhere to the dictates of the organisation (Cf, Francis 2014, no. 51). The demands of this cohesion of this international organisation and its members' States are on the elimination of conflicts and wars among nations, for political litigations and its monitoring, for good administrations of international policies, and economic diplomatic principles for the whole humanity that will foster integral human development as its encourages international partnership in technological, scientific, cultural, social and financial services (Francis, 2016, no. 3).

Evaluative conclusion

From the foregoing, analysing the moral intensity of *Laudato Si* relation to the weighty nature of contemporary environmental degradation, it inferred that the culture of common good demands on humanity to embrace all the contents of the environment in order to be fully alive and developed (see, Isanbor, Okoro and Ayetin, 2015, 18). This moral logic inferred that the contents of the environment define the living condition of humanity. Humanity must respect environment to avoid its extinction. This is the moral thrust of *Laudatosi*. It situates that moral ecology will breed integral habitual ecology for integral human development. In all, humanity calls always for healthy and just social conditioning of integral ecological sustainability. Then the world calls on humanity to respect the environment and in turn, since, by so doing, it will house humanity healthily as the Divine has designated it. Everything on our planet is interconnected. While nature supplies us with valuable environmental services without which we cannot exist, it keeps us in shape within the respect for natural law.

Perhaps we should adopt a holistic view of nature, for it is not an entity that exists separately from us: it is we. We are an inevitable part of it, and we should

care for it in the most appropriate manner. Only then can we possibly solve the problem of environmental pollution (Bello 2012, 123).

According to Francis' *Laudato si*, through proper management of the environment, the global human community will achieve comfortable and desirable living conditions. Such achievement will remain ever possible when human exercises of freedom are properly checkmated. These are very possible when the true and integral human work in pursuance of integral human development is respected, protected and promoted as a right. The respect of right for dignity of human labour or work indicates the indispensable workability of natural law which recognises the power of human creativity through his/her ordered intelligibility and critical rationality. It should be critical and ordered in its applications to curtail its excess in order to respect the placement of the principles of common good and solidarity of purpose in pursuance of common development

Therefore, as a social document for societal reformation and revamping, Francis' *Laudato si* calls on all of us to recognise the possible realization of ecological sustainability through the doctrine of "Common God." Such calls for proactive consciousness necessarily engender the culture of "Common Good", and it will objectively initiate the vitality of "Common Humanity" which in turn, will propel the safe practicability of "Common Ecology". The quests for integral ecological sustainability within the factors of integral human development are the progressive changes, in which the potentials of the earth by individuals and State's authority are met for the betterment of the human family. The issues of the provisions of basic amenities, such as, power, water, security, medicines and the likes should be within principles of nature, that is, respecting the indicatives of natural law. It is the nature of man to seek positive development, not the contrary. So, the activities of the applicable tools of science and technology should be properly examined and monitored in fostering integral human development.

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