
Anthropocentrism and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of *Laudato Si'* on the Church's Role in Public Policy Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Background: The ecological crisis has emerged as one of the most urgent global challenges, driven largely by anthropocentric paradigms that legitimize the exploitation of nature for economic and technological interests.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the ecological crisis through an ecotheological interpretation of *Laudato Si'* and to examine the Church's prophetic role in transforming ecological public policy.

Method: This research employs a qualitative literature-based design using a hermeneutic-ecotheological approach. Primary data were obtained from *Laudato Si'*, while secondary sources included ecotheological literature, Catholic Social Teaching, environmental ethics, and public policy studies. Data were analyzed through textual interpretation, thematic categorization, and conceptual synthesis.

Findings and Implications: The findings reveal that anthropocentrism contributes to deforestation, climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, and social inequality. Ecological degradation also fosters spiritual alienation and weakens human responsibility toward creation. The Church's prophetic mission is reflected in ecological advocacy, environmental education, ethical criticism of exploitative development, and participation in policy discourse based on integral ecology. These findings suggest that ecological ethics can provide a normative basis for sustainable and socially responsible public policies.

Conclusion: The ecological crisis represents an environmental, social, and moral challenge that requires a transformation of values and policies. Integral ecology offers a comprehensive framework for promoting sustainability, environmental justice, and the common good through collaborative action among religious institutions, governments, and society.

Keywords:

anthropocentrism, ecological crisis, *laudato si'*, ecotheology, church

INTRODUCTION

The socioeconomic disparities between the rich and the poor do not alter the ontological essence of human beings as creatures possessing equal dignity. In the study of the philosophy of humanity and the theology of creation, humans are understood as entities possessing the same fundamental standing within the structure of reality, regardless of the social constructs attached to

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them. This perspective affirms that economic stratification is a socio-historical phenomenon, not a determinant of human intrinsic value (Panjaitan, 2021). However, the disregard for this intrinsic value often stems from an anthropocentric paradigm that places human interests above the ecosystem's order, thereby triggering environmental degradation that actually threatens that very dignity (Simatupang, 2025; Droz, 2022).

Within the framework of creation theology, particularly in the Catholic Church tradition, humans are not positioned as an absolute center (radical anthropocentrism), but rather as an integral part of the entire cosmic order (Kopnina et al., 2021). Ontologically and ecologically, humans share an existential interconnectedness with nature. This is not merely a normative-theological matter but can also be scientifically explained through ecological and biological principles. For instance, in biogeochemical cycles, there is a reciprocal relationship between humans and plants through gas exchange: humans require oxygen (O₂) produced via photosynthesis, while plants utilize carbon dioxide (CO₂) from human respiration. This mechanism demonstrates that human life depends on a broader ecological system (Gocko, 2024).

This concept affirms that humans are part of the macrocosm (the universe), as well as a microcosm that reflects order on a smaller scale. Thus, the relationship between humans and nature is interdependent and systemic (Sestyaningrum, 2018; Messias, 2024). From an environmental science perspective, this interdependence is reflected in the concept of an ecosystem, where each component performs mutually supportive functions in maintaining environmental balance (homeostasis). However, in modern development, there has been a significant paradigm shift toward anthropocentrism (Negedu & Faruna, 2024).

This paradigm places humans at the center of value and constructs nature as an object to be exploited instrumentally. Advances in science and technology, which should strengthen our understanding of ecological interconnections, are in practice often used to overexploit natural resources. This is reinforced by a modern economic system oriented toward unlimited growth and mass consumption. The impacts of this paradigm can be empirically observed through various global environmental crises, such as climate change, deforestation, land degradation, and environmental pollution. Scientific data indicates that human activities are the dominant factor in changes to the Earth system (the Anthropocene) (Beling, 2023).

In this context, the relationship between humans and nature has shifted from a reciprocal relationship to one of domination, leading to ecological imbalance. Previous studies have examined ecological issues from various theological, philosophical, and ethical perspectives. This study highlights the ethical consequences of human-centered paradigms but does not deeply engage with theological anthropology as a foundational framework (Imanaka et al., 2017).

Similarly, Hearn et al, (2024) discusses ecological responsibility within Christian ethics, arguing that environmental care is an essential expression of faith and moral responsibility. This work contributes to the understanding of ecological ethics in religious life; however, it tends to focus more on normative

ethical instruction without fully integrating scientific ecological principles or broader philosophical anthropology. Their study shows that *Laudato Si'* promotes the concept of integral ecology, which connects environmental, social, and spiritual dimensions. Nevertheless, the discussion remains largely centered on theological interpretation and ecclesial teaching, with limited engagement in interdisciplinary synthesis involving ecological science and philosophical anthropology.

Although these studies provide valuable contributions to the discourse on ecology and theology, they generally treat environmental issues from separate disciplinary perspectives. There is still a lack of integrated analysis that combines philosophical anthropology, creation theology, and ecological science in explaining the relationship between human dignity and environmental responsibility. This gap indicates the need for further research that develops a more holistic and interdisciplinary framework in understanding ecological crisis and human existence.

Furthermore, the anthropocentric paradigm contributes to social inequality, as the exploitation of natural resources often disproportionately impacts the poor. In other words, ecological crises and socio-economic crises are structurally interconnected. Vulnerable groups tend to be more severely affected by environmental degradation, such as droughts, floods, and limited access to natural resources (Parsons et al., 2025).

In this context, an approach is needed that integrates theological, philosophical, and scientific dimensions to understand the relationship between humans and nature more comprehensively. This approach emphasizes that humans are not absolute rulers but rather part of a broader system of life, bearing an ethical responsibility to maintain environmental balance and sustainability. Thus, a paradigm shift in the relationship between humans and nature has become an urgent necessity, both in conceptual terms and in practice.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a philosophical-theological research orientation. The use of a qualitative design is appropriate because this study does not aim to measure empirical variables, but to interpret conceptual, ethical, and theological meanings related to anthropocentrism, ecological crisis, and the Church's ecological teaching in *Laudato Si'*. In this context, qualitative inquiry is used to explore meanings, interpret texts, and construct conceptual understanding within ecotheological discourse.

The research design is a qualitative literature review with a hermeneutical approach. As a library-based study, this research does not involve fieldwork, participants, or a specific geographical location. Therefore, there are no human subjects or research sites involved. Instead, the "subjects" of analysis are texts, including the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, relevant theological documents, philosophical works, and academic literature on ecology and environmental ethics.

The hermeneutical framework applied in this study draws primarily on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Paul Ricoeur's interpretative theory. Gadamer's concept of "historically effected consciousness" is used to understand *Laudato Si'* as a text situated within a specific historical and ecclesial context, while Ricoeur's interpretative approach supports a deeper structural analysis of meaning, symbol, and ethical implication within the text. Through this combined framework, interpretation is conducted not only at the literal level but also at the contextual and normative levels.

The primary data source in this study is the encyclical *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis. Secondary data are derived from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and scholarly publications in the fields of ecotheology, environmental philosophy, anthropology, and public policy. Data sources were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) relevance to ecotheology, anthropocentrism, and ecological ethics; (2) publication in reputable academic journals or publishers; (3) publication within the last ten years, except for foundational theoretical works; and (4) accessibility in English or Indonesian language. Sources that do not meet academic credibility standards or are not directly relevant to the research focus were excluded.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation and literature mapping. The literature was collected from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed publications (where available), and institutional theological repositories. Each source was reviewed, categorized, and organized based on thematic relevance, including anthropocentrism, ecological crisis, ecotheology, and Church social teaching.

The instrument used in this research is a literature analysis matrix, which functions to systematically organize data from selected texts. The matrix includes categories such as author, year of publication, key arguments, theoretical perspective, and relevance to ecotheological interpretation. In addition, analytical note-taking and textual annotation were used as supporting instruments to identify key theological and philosophical concepts within the selected literature.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytical and hermeneutical methods. The analysis process was carried out in three stages. First, data reduction, in which relevant literature was selected and categorized according to thematic focus. Second, textual interpretation, in which key concepts from *Laudato Si'* and supporting literature were analyzed using hermeneutical principles. Third, conceptual synthesis, in which findings from various sources were integrated to construct a comprehensive understanding of anthropocentrism, ecological crisis, and ecotheological responsibility. This process allows for the development of a coherent interpretative framework connecting theology, philosophy, and ecological science.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied, including source triangulation, credibility checking through peer-reviewed academic references, and reflexive interpretation to minimize researcher bias. Consistency in interpretation was maintained by continuously

comparing findings across multiple sources and ensuring alignment with established ecotheological frameworks.

The urgency of addressing the ecological crisis is increasingly evident in contemporary global reports. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), human-induced greenhouse gas emissions have significantly contributed to global warming, leading to rising temperatures, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and ecological vulnerability across regions. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reports that deforestation, pollution, and unsustainable production and consumption patterns continue to accelerate global ecological degradation. These findings indicate that environmental issues are not merely scientific problems but also ethical, social, and theological concerns requiring interdisciplinary responses.

Within this context, *Laudato Si'* provides a foundational ecotheological framework that critiques anthropocentrism and promotes the concept of integral ecology. Integral ecology emphasizes the interconnection between environmental, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of life. However, despite its growing influence, there remains limited scholarly attention to how *Laudato Si'* can contribute to ecological public policy transformation and the Church's prophetic role in environmental governance.

Several previous studies have examined ecotheological and ecological ethics perspectives. However, most of these studies focus primarily on theological reflection or ethical discourse, without sufficiently addressing the relationship between ecotheology and public policy transformation. This gap highlights the need for a more integrated analytical framework that connects anthropocentrism, ecotheology, and policy implications (Zepeda, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of ecotheological interpretation of *Laudato Si'* with an analysis of the Church's prophetic role in ecological public policy transformation. Unlike previous studies, which tend to separate theological reflection from policy analysis, this research bridges ecotheology and governance discourse through the framework of integral ecology (Molina & Pérez-Garrido, 2022).

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze the ecological crisis resulting from anthropocentric paradigms through the ecotheological perspective of *Laudato Si'* and to examine the role of the Church in contributing to ecological public policy transformation. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of ecotheology by integrating philosophical, theological, and policy-oriented perspectives. Practically, it provides insights for policymakers, religious institutions, and civil society actors in developing sustainable and ethically grounded environmental policies (Christie et al., 2019; Saputra, K. D., & Maharani, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Anthropocentrism is one of the dominant concepts in modern human life, in which humans place themselves at the center of everything and as the primary standard for assessing reality (Muthmainnah, L, et.al, 2020). Within this framework, nature and all its elements are understood as objects that can

be exploited to fulfill human needs, desires, and even ambitions. This paradigm has evolved alongside the progress of modernity, which emphasizes instrumental rationality and a results-oriented approach, so that nature is no longer viewed as a fellow creation possessing intrinsic value, but rather as a means of production that can be continuously exploited (Droz, 2022). Human needs, which were originally basic and limited, have gradually transformed into unlimited desires, indicating that environmental exploitation is no longer driven by necessity but by patterns of consumption shaped by greed and instant gratification.

In this context, anthropocentrism does not merely function as a worldview but also operates as a structural logic within modern civilization. This logic has led humanity into a paradoxical condition (Beling, 2023). On one hand, humans have achieved unprecedented control over nature; on the other hand, this very control generates ecological risks that threaten human survival itself (Sukarna, 2021). Phenomena such as air pollution, global warming, deforestation, and environmental degradation are direct consequences of this exploitative worldview. Massive deforestation not only destroys biodiversity but also disrupts ecological balance, resulting in floods, droughts, and climate instability. As a result, the relationship between humans and nature shifts from reciprocity to domination, indicating a breakdown of ecological relationality.

Furthermore, this anthropocentric orientation fosters a lifestyle centered on instant gratification and material accumulation. Modern humans increasingly prioritize speed, convenience, and economic profit, often disregarding ecological consequences. Practices such as excessive resource extraction, improper waste disposal, and unsustainable development reflect the decline of ecological consciousness. Development is therefore frequently reduced to economic expansion, while ethical, spiritual, and ecological dimensions are marginalized. Consequently, humanity not only damages nature but also becomes alienated from its own identity as part of creation (Kurios, 2019).

This paradigm stands in fundamental opposition to creation theology within the Catholic tradition. In this theological framework, nature is understood as God's good creation, which possesses intrinsic value and therefore cannot be reduced to an object of exploitation. Human beings, although endowed with reason and freedom, are not granted absolute domination over creation but are entrusted with responsibility to care for it. Within Catholic social teaching, ecological stewardship is grounded in moral responsibility, respect, and recognition of the interconnectedness of all creation.

From this perspective, humans must reconstruct their relationship with nature in a more ethical and spiritual direction. Other living beings are not secondary elements but integral parts of creation that reflect divine wisdom. Humans, therefore, are not the center of creation but participants within it (Kopnina et al., 2021). As a microcosm, humanity is part of a larger cosmic order and cannot justify unlimited exploitation. This awareness forms the foundation for an ecological paradigm that emphasizes balance, responsibility, and harmony within creation.

Crises and suffering for the poor: severe weather and drought

In the context of contemporary ecological crisis, environmental degradation significantly disrupts climate systems and weather patterns. Deforestation, resource exploitation, and pollution interfere with ecological cycles, including the hydrological cycle responsible for rainfall formation (Golar et al., 2024). Forest destruction reduces evapotranspiration, which decreases atmospheric moisture and destabilizes precipitation patterns. This results in prolonged droughts, unpredictable weather, and reduced water availability. These impacts are not distributed equally. Poor communities, particularly those dependent on agriculture, experience the most severe consequences (Parsons et al., 2025). Farmers face uncertainty in planting seasons, crop failures, and food insecurity.

Access to clean water is also increasingly limited due to declining ecosystem quality. In many cases, large-scale economic development intensifies this inequality by restricting local access to land and natural resources. This condition reflects structural injustice in which ecological risks are disproportionately borne by marginalized groups, while economic benefits are concentrated among dominant actors. From the perspective of *Laudato Si'*, this situation demonstrates the distortion of the earth as our common home, where ecological and social justice are undermined by exploitative economic systems.

Social Injustice Toward Animals and the Poor: Ecosystem Degradation and Crop Failures

From the perspective of creation theology, all creation is fundamentally good and possesses intrinsic value (Samosir et al., 2022). Therefore, no creature should be reduced to a mere object of exploitation. Excessive environmental exploitation generates injustice not only among humans but also toward non-human creation.

Deforestation leads to habitat loss, disruption of food chains, and species extinction. Animals lose their ecological space and survival resources. In addition, soil degradation caused by pollution and chemical waste reduces fertility and agricultural productivity. These conditions result in long-term ecological and socio-economic losses, including increased crop failure and reduced food security. Thus, ecological damage produces a chain of injustice affecting humans, animals, and ecosystems simultaneously (Gocko, 2024).

Loss of Meaning: The Crisis of Living Space and Spirituality

Environmental degradation also produces a deeper existential crisis: the loss of meaning in human–nature relationships. Natural environments function not only as physical spaces but also as spiritual spaces that enable reflection and contemplation (Messias, 2024). In contrast, urbanized environments dominated by artificial structures reduce human engagement with natural processes such as seasonal cycles and ecological harmony.

This disconnection results in alienation, diminished inspiration, and weakened spiritual awareness (Nur et al., 2023). Nature, therefore, is not merely a material resource but also a source of meaning that shapes human

consciousness. When nature is destroyed, humans lose not only ecological stability but also existential depth (Negedu & Faruna, 2024).

Value Relativism: Short-Term Gains and Moral Crisis

Modernity and technological development have contributed to the emergence of value relativism, where moral truth is no longer understood as universal but as context-dependent. This condition leads to moral fragmentation, where each group defines its own ethical standards.

As a result, environmental and social decisions are often based on short-term economic benefits without considering long-term consequences (Muthmainnah, L, et.al, 2020). This creates persistent conflicts of interest and weakens collective ethical responsibility. Society becomes fragmented, lacking a shared moral compass oriented toward the common good (Imanaka et al., 2017).

Ideological Competition: Church and State in an Ecological Context

In the ecological crisis, there exists a tension between the state's structural-economic approach and the Church's ethical-spiritual perspective. The state prioritizes economic growth and resource management, while the Church, through *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes moral responsibility and ecological integrity (Christie et al., 2019). This difference reflects a deeper paradigmatic conflict between utilitarian-economic rationality and ethical-ecological rationality. The Church functions as a prophetic voice that critiques systems that reduce nature to economic capital (Hearn et al., 2024).

Within capitalist logic, nature is treated as an economic resource to maximize profit. This instrumental rationality prioritizes utility over intrinsic value. Consequently, environmental degradation can be understood as a form of structural violence that disproportionately affects the poor (Zepeda, 2025). Thus, ecological injustice reflects a violation of the principle of the common good (*bonum commune*). Excessive exploitation exceeds ecological carrying capacity, resulting in climate change, biodiversity loss, and long-term systemic injustice (Molina & Pérez-Garrido, 2022). proposes integral ecology, which restores the interconnectedness between environmental, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions of life (Saputra, K. D., & Maharani, 2023). Within this framework, humans are no longer masters of creation but participants in a shared ecological community.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the ecological crisis is fundamentally rooted in an anthropocentric paradigm that positions human beings as the center of reality and reduces nature to an object of exploitation. Such a paradigm contributes not only to environmental degradation, including climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution, but also to widening social inequality, habitat destruction, spiritual alienation, and moral fragmentation.

Through an ecotheological interpretation of *Laudato Si'*, the study demonstrates that ecological and social crises are interconnected realities that require an integrated response. The concept of integral ecology offers an

alternative framework by emphasizing the interconnectedness of environmental, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions of life. Within this framework, the Church exercises a prophetic role through ecological advocacy, ethical critique of exploitative development models, environmental education, and participation in public policy discourse. Consequently, ecological ethics grounded in integral ecology can contribute to the development of sustainable governance that promotes environmental justice, social responsibility, and the common good.

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