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43

LAUDATO SI’ AND ECOLOGY

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FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY
RELATIONAL BASES VS. THE THROWAWAY CULTURE

SUMMARY: In the light of both the encyclical *Laudato Si’* and Franciscan spirituality, this article affirms the need to revise the dualistic anthropology that has led to the throwaway culture and to a dynamic of permanent conflict at all levels. Based on ontic and ontological dualisms, the thesis of human exception has accentuated the separation between human beings and all other creatures, giving rise to an irresponsible and domineering anthropocentrism that has caused the current socio-environmental crisis. To overcome it, we need to assume a dialogical anthropology, an integral ecology, and a spirituality that “can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” [LS 216]. In this way, Humans and all other creatures will again “extend a friendly hand to one another” [LS 106].

In the light of both the encyclical *Laudato Si’* and Franciscan spirituality, this article affirms the need to overcome the ontic and ontological dualisms that have led to the technocratic paradigm, the throwaway culture, and a dynamic of permanent conflict at all levels. The thesis of human exception grounds on those dualisms to accentuate the separation between man and the other beings, giving rise to a despotic and irresponsible anthropocentrism. To overcome the current socio-environmental crisis, we need to assume a relational paradigm and a spirituality that “can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” ¹.

The encyclical *Laudato Si’* promotes a comprehensive conception of ecology and anthropology. In nature, everything is connected and, therefore, the “ecological” must not be reduced to the “green”; i.e., it should not be considered as something alien to

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¹ Francis, “Encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*” [=LS], May 24, 2015, n. 106, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2015. In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Laudato Si’* will be indicated with just the numbers in brackets.
social dynamics and human interaction. “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”\(^2\).

The first part of this article focuses on both the dualistic anthropology and the thesis of human exception. The two following parts take inspiration from the Franciscan spirituality and the encyclical *Laudato Si’* in order to identify the anthropological and theological bases for a new relational paradigm. The fourth part offers some lines of action to foster the paradigm change and a more integral ecology\(^3\).

### 1. Essentialist Anthropology and Throwaway Culture

In Western culture, the relationship between humans and the environment has been interpreted usually from the viewpoint of an anthropocentric ideology. With Modernity, this perspective receives new impetus, to the point of defending the absolute dominion of man over nature and over his own body. In the nineteenth century, Scientism reinforces still further this anthropocentrism, as it replaces ethical rationality with instrumental rationality\(^4\), thus giving way to the technocratic paradigm\(^5\) and the throwaway culture.

The current socio-environmental crisis is a consequence of that essentialist anthropology that divides man internally and separates him from the other living beings. It is necessary to assume an integral anthropology, overcoming “such unhealthy dualisms that left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history” [98].

#### 1.1. Ontic dualism

Western philosophy has appealed to creation or evolution to develop an essentialist anthropological conception that emphasizes the separation between man and all other creatures. The thesis of human exception postulates an ontic rupture between man and the rest of creation, which would belong to another order of being. Consequently, man does not attribute any rights to animals and does not feel obliged by any duties towards them. He even considers nature as pure neutral matter, without any intrinsic value, totally available at his disposal.

This thesis of human exception is based not only on the ontic and ontological dualisms, but also on the exclusive human capacity to access epistemic and ethical knowledge in ways that are out of reach for all other creatures. According to J.M.


