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Adres wydawcy

Akademia Katolicka w Warszawie
ul. Dewajtis 3, 01-815 Warszawa
www.akademiakatolicka.pl

Redakcja

ul. Dewajtis 3, 01-815 Warszawa
e-mail: wst@akademiakatolicka.pl

Skład, druk i oprawa:

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Martín Carbajo-Núñez OFM¹

PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY ANTONIANUM, ROME, ITALY

ALFONSIANUM (PONTIFICAL LATERAN UNIVERSITY), ROME, ITALY

FST – UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, USA

ORCID: 0000-0002-2814-5688

THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES AND SUSTAINABILITY: LISTENING TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH

The current economy system excels at producing material goods, yet it generates dissatisfaction, threatens the sustainability of the global ecosystem, and widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Economic growth has become the primary objective, reducing nature and workers to mere resources for profit (Boff, 1993, p. 42–43). “These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out” (Francis, 2015, 53).

The cry of the earth is inextricably linked to the cry of the poor and marginalized, who disproportionately suffer the consequences of environmental degradation. In a sense, Francis of Assisi shows this connection between nature and the

¹ Prof. dr. **Martín Cabajo-Núñez OFM** - born in Zamora, Spain, Martín Carbajo Núñez, OFM has lived in Rome since 1995, where he currently teaches ethics and communication at two universities: the Antonianum (Pontifical University Antonianum or PUA) and the Alfonsianum (Pontifical Lateran University or PUL). At the PUA, he has served as Vice-Rector and Rector Magnificus ad interim for three years. He also teaches regularly in Spain and the USA. Professor Carbajo studies the relevance of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition in formulating a global ethic and facing the challenges of the new digital age. He also studies journalistic deontology in regard to informational privacy, e-mail: mcarbajon@gmail.com.

poor by choosing the dialect of the humblest to praise God through all creatures.

In response to these cries, Pope Francis (2019, p. 8) has called for an eco-centric and fraternal economy, oriented toward the common good and “attentive above all to the poor and excluded.” To promote it, he convened an international gathering of young economists (under 35) in Assisi in 2020, titled “*The Economy of Francesco*,” and aimed at replacing the prevailing technocentric paradigm, which is detrimental to life. “This economy kills,” the Pope warns (Tornielli, Galeazzi, 2015).

By organizing that event in Assisi, the Pope acknowledged the significant contribution of the Franciscan tradition to economic thought. In his encyclical *Laudato si’*, he presented Francis of Assisi as a universal brother, fully reconciled with God, others, himself, and creation. He also proposed his *Canticle of the creatures* as the reading key of the entire encyclical. Decades earlier, in 1979, Pope John Paul II (1979, p. 1509–1510) had already proclaimed Saint Francis the patron saint “of those who promote ecology” (*oecologicae cultorum*).

This article explores the ecological challenges posed by the current economic system, which prioritizes material growth and fuels relentless consumerism. Rather than addressing genuine human needs—which are inherently limited—it stimulates unlimited desires, endangering the sustainability of the global ecosystem and amplifying *the cry of the earth* (Part 1). At the root of the harm inflicted on both people and the planet lies a distorted anthropological vision. Indeed, “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (Francis, 2015, 118). Human beings are portrayed as insatiable consumers, trapped in a perpetual conflict with the world around them. To break free from this cycle of exploitation and self-destruction, we must foster a new relational paradigm inspired by Francis of Assisi (Part 2) and his *Canticle of the Creatures* (Part 3) (Francis of Assisi, 2001b).

1. CRY OF THE EARTH: AN UNSUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

During the Middle Ages and the mercantilist era, economies were structured primarily around the control of land, natural resources, and trade routes. In the feudal system of the Middle Ages, stability and self-sufficiency were more valued than growth. With the rise of mercantilism (15th–18th centuries), wealth was associated with the accumulation of precious metals like gold and silver, which were seen as key to national power. The primary goal was not economic growth for its own sake, but rather the enrichment of the state to enhance its political and military dominance.