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“EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED”
Communication and integral ecology in the light
of the encyclical *Laudato Si’*

“TODO ESTÁ CONECTADO”
Comunicación y ecología integral a la luz
de la Encíclica *Laudato Si’*

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Abstract: In the light of the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, this paper presents interaction and communication as essential aspects of all that exists. Humans are dialogical beings and “everything is connected”. The first part studies the theological and ethical bases of both communication and integral ecology. Everything has been created through the Word and is ordered to the affectionate and fraternal encounter. The second part asserts the need for ecological conversion and then focuses on the media. They are gifts of God that can contribute decisively to strengthening the bonds of fraternal communication and communion. However, they also present ethical challenges that must be addressed.

Key words: Communication ethics, *Laudato Si’*, Integral ecology, Media, ecological conversion

Resumen: A la luz de la encíclica *Laudato Si’*, este artículo presenta la relación y la comunicación como elementos constitutivos de la realidad. “Todo está conectado”. Todo el ecosistema es una red de relaciones y el hombre, imagen del Dios trinitario, es un ser dialógico y relacional. La primera parte del artículo estudia las bases teológicas y éticas de la comunicación y de la ecología integral. Todo ha sido creado a través de la Palabra y ha sido ordenado al encuentro fraterno y comunicativo. La segunda parte afirma la necesidad de conversión ecológica y después se centra en los medios de comunicación social. Estos son dones de Dios que pueden contribuir grandemente al fortalecimiento de los vínculos de comunicación y comunión. Sin embargo, también presentan desafíos éticos que es preciso abordar.

Palabras clave: Ética, *Laudato Si’*, Ecología integral, Medios de comunicación, Conversión ecológica.

In the light of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, this paper presents interaction and communication as essential aspects of all that exists.¹ “Everything is connected.” [91] The whole ecosystem is a web of relationships and the human person, created in the image of the Trinitarian God, is a dialogic and relational being.

The Means of Social Communication [=MSC] must contribute to communion and integral ecology, strengthening the four fundamental relationships of the human being (God, others, oneself, and creation). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. *Laudato Si'* warns about the risk of using them in a wrong way, because they “have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration.”² They influence our lifestyle and, therefore, the whole ecosystem. We all are immersed in the social environment shaped by the media and have to learn how to inhabit it responsibly.³

Communication is neither an end in itself nor a simple transmission of data. To be authentic, it must be oriented to building up community through communion. “At its most profound level, it is the giving of self in love.”⁴

The first part of this paper studies the theological and ethical bases of both communication and integral ecology. Everything has been created through the Word and is ordered to the affectionate and fraternal encounter. The human being, *imago Dei*, has the mission of strengthening the fraternal bonds in the common home. The second part asserts the need for ecological conversion and then focuses on some ethical aspects of the media. They are gifts of God that can contribute decisively to integral ecology and to strengthening the bonds of fraternal communication. However, they also present ethical challenges that must be addressed.

¹ FRANCIS, «Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*» [=LS] May 24, 2015, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, [=AAS] 107 (2015) 847-945. In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* will be indicated with just the numbers in brackets. The Italian version of this paper will be published in: *Path* 17/2 (2018)

² JOHN PAUL II, «Encyclical letter *Redemptoris missio*» Dec. 7, 1990, [=RM] n. 37, in *AAS*, 83 (1991) 249-340.

³ Media Ecology has been developed in the last decades, taking inspiration from Marshall McLuhan. “Media ecology is the study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information, and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs.” L. STRATE, «Understanding MEA» in *Medias Res* 7/1 (1999) 1-2. More information in Internet: http://www.media-ecology.org/media_ecology/. [Last visit: July 30, 2018]

⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, [=PCSC] «Pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio*» May 23, 1971, [=CP] n. 11, in *AAS* 63 (1971) 593-656.

1. Creation is a web of relationships

All that exists has been “created according to the divine model” and, therefore, “is a web of relationships”⁵ at all levels: “between ecosystems and between the various spheres of social interaction.” [141]

“Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. [...] Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.” [240]

Laudato Si' “invites us to develop a spirituality” [240] and a mystic that can reopen our eyes, so that we can experience “the intimate connection between God and all beings” [234] and see nature as a joyful mystery of communion and relationships. We are closely connected to all living creatures and share with them the same physical and chemical substrate, as well as “a large part of the genetic information.” [138] Therefore, we need to reinforce the “awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone.” [202]

1.1. Before the *creatio ex nihilo*, communication already existed

Before the *creatio ex nihilo*, communication already existed among the divine persons. Indeed, the Trinitarian God is agape, self-giving, community of three persons.⁶ He is communion in plurality, the source of any unity and diversity.⁷

God is relationship in himself, communion *ad intra* and *ad extra*. “The divine Persons are subsistent relations.” [240] The Father is the Lover, the Son is

⁵ LS 240. A more complete presentation of this first part: M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, *A free and fraternal economy. The Franciscan perspective*, Media House, Delhi, 2018; Id., «Franciscan Spirituality and Integral ecology. Relational bases vs the Throwaway culture,» in *Islamochristiana* 43 (2017) 59-78.

⁶ 1Jn 4:8. Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate*, XV, c. 16, in J.-P. MIGNE, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 226 voll., Paris 1841-1864, [=PL] vol. 42.

⁷ La unidad divina “será tanto más evidente cuanto más clara sea la distinción de las personas, y viceversa.” En efecto, la total comunión de las tres personas “no excluye, sino que afirma, la existencia de tres ‘yo’, pero al mismo tiempo elimina radicalmente la posibilidad de un ‘tuyo’ y un ‘mío.’” Esa unidad se expresa en “la mutua habitación o perichóresis de las mismas.” L. F. LADARIA, *La Trinidad, Misterio de Comuni3n*, Secretariado Trinitario, Salamanca 2002, 128-129.

the Beloved, the Spirit is Love. Being the Beloved, the Word is also the center of the eternal intra-Trinitarian communication and of his epiphany in creation.

The supreme intra-Trinitarian communicability is the most perfect at all. Indeed, the Good is essentially diffusive of itself (“*Bonum est essentialiter diffusivum sui*”)⁸ and the higher it is, the more intimately it communicates itself. The intra-Trinitarian communicability is the highest and the most perfect one, as God is the supreme Good. Being the highest Good, the Trinitarian God is absolutely diffusive, because giving Himself fully and freely is the most perfect act that Love can do. He is the utmost model of communication and communion.

His self-communication in the economy of Salvation is absolutely gracious and free.⁹ The “incarnation of the Word is the supreme free act of God.”¹⁰ Indeed, He “made the first move to make contact with mankind at the start of the history of salvation.” (CP 10)

The Creator is not a “motionless mover,” distant, impassive, and predictable, but a free and creative being, “a lover with all the passion of true love.”¹¹ He creates and sustains because he loves; that is, because he wants the good of all his creatures.

“For you love all things that are, and loathe nothing that you have made; for you would not fashion what you hate. How could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? (Wis 11, 24-24)

1.1.1. *The Trinitarian communion: origin, way, and destiny of all that exists*

The Trinitarian communion is the origin, way, and destiny of creation; that is, God is the efficient, exemplary, and final cause of all that exists.

⁸ Thomas AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, [=S. Th.] I q.5 a.4 ad 2, 35 voll., Studio Domenicano, Firenze 1949-1975.

⁹ “The Trinity that manifests itself in the economy of salvation is an immanent Trinity, and it is this Trinity that gives itself freely and graciously in the economy of salvation.” INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, «Theology, Christology, Anthropology,» 1981, n. 2, in Id., *Text and documents*, 1969-1985, Vol I, edited by Mons. M. Sharkey, Ignatius press, San Francisco 2009, 211-228, here 215.

¹⁰ L.F. LADARIA, *El Dios vivo y verdadero. El misterio de la Trinidad*, Secretariado Trinitario, Salamanca 1998, 32. [my translation]

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, «Encyclical letter *Deus caritas est.*» [=DC] Dec. 25, 2005, n. 10, in AAS 98 (2006) 217-252. In Scotus, “the primacy of the will sheds light on the fact that God is charity before all else.” BENEDICT XVI, «Apostolic Letter on the occasion of the 7th centenary of the death of blessed John Duns Scotus (Oct. 28, 2008),» in *L'Osservatore Romano*, [=OR] Dec. 24, 2008, 9.

“The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property.” [238]

God creates and sustains in the eternal today. The entire creation has its origin in the love of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit; it is sustained by God’s loving presence and is destined to the eternal Trinitarian dwelling, when Christ will hand over the world to the Father and God will “be all in all.”¹²

The gratuity of God’s love, which gives rise to the common home of the cosmos, is also its final destination, its definitive homeland. Everything that comes into existence is a gift of God’s magnanimity and is oriented to it; that is, everything is destined to realize the fullness of love. Indeed, “the ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things.” [83]

1.1.2. “In the beginning was the Word”

All that exists has the same source, the Trinitarian God, and the same mediator, the Word. Christ is the firstborn, the beginning, and the end of all things, which “were created through him and for him.”¹³ Bonaventure affirms that Christ perfectly expresses the Father (Col 1:15) and, at the same time, is the exemplar, the model, and the prototype of all beings.¹⁴ He is the universal mediator, the one who catalyzes the cosmic longing, and unites all beings in his mystical body.

Creation is a free fruit of the Word (the Son) that the Father pronounces and that takes form by the power of the Spirit. This pronounced Word demands a

¹² 1Cor 15:28; Col 3:11. “Just as the human person, soul and body will be transformed in the resurrection, so too will the cosmos... brought into the glorification of the full body of Christ.” I. DELIO – K.D. WARNER – P. WOOD, *Care for Creation. A Franciscan spirituality of the earth*, Franciscan Media, Cincinnati 2007, 91.

¹³ Col 1:16; cf. Jn 1:3; 1Cor 8:5-6; Col 1:15-20; Ef 1:3-14.

¹⁴ “Verbum ergo exprimit Patrem et res, quae per ipsum factae sunt.” BONAVENTURE, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, [=Hex.] I, 17, in Id., *Opera omnia*, 10 voll., Typ. Collegii s. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi 1882-1902 [=Quaracchi] V 332a.

response. The Incarnate Word is the perfect answer that God the Father expects. In him, the whole creation becomes a grateful response to the Father.

Thanks to the hypostatic union, Christ is the perfect interlocutor of the Father in the Spirit, the closest to his essential purpose and to the love with which God loves. He continues the dialogue that has its origin, foundation, and ultimate destiny in the Trinity. “Human history and all human relationships exist within the framework established by this self-communication of God in Christ. [...] In and through him, God’s own life is communicated to humanity by the Spirit’s action.”¹⁵

“When the fullness of time had come,” (Gal 4:4) the Word humbled and emptied himself, (*Kenosis*) assumed our human condition, became “God-with-us,” (Is 7:14) so that we can live in God. “Taking the form of slave and coming in human likeness,” (cf. Phil 2:7) he has made possible a close relationship and communion with us, in the immediacy.¹⁶ Since then, his mystery “is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.” [99]

In the paschal mystery, Christ renews the wonders of the first creation, restores the dialogue with God, and makes us sons in the Son. Since then, we can participate, in Christ, at the eternal intra-Trinitarian dialogue. “The destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ.” [99]

1.1.3. *Christ is the perfect Communicator*

In its revealing/salvific significance, the Incarnation of the Word can be understood not so much as reestablishing the dialogue made impracticable by sin,¹⁷ (traditional approach) but rather as a refinement of the communication already set up from the beginning.¹⁸ (Duns Scotus) According to this second approach, the Word would have become flesh even if man had not sinned. Therefore, in addition to restoring the dialogue damaged by sin, the incarnate Word deepens from within and leads to perfection the original predestination of man to dialogue with his Creator.

¹⁵ PCSC, «Pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae*» [=AN] Feb. 22, 1992, n. 6, in AAS 84 (1992) 447-468.

¹⁶ “In these last days, he spoke to us through a son.” Heb 1:2.

¹⁷ Dialogue has been interrupted, but not canceled altogether; otherwise, sin would have destroyed man’s ontological identity of “*imago Dei*,” which would be absurd.

¹⁸ Cf. M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, «Duns Scoto e il dialogo oggi,» in *Studi ecumenici* 27/4 (2009) 445-476.

Christ is “the perfect Communicator,” (CP 11) the one who makes peace between God and us. He also lays “the foundations of unity” among humans¹⁹ and among all beings. He gives us the freedom of God’s children, breaks down the dividing wall that prevents mutual acceptance, (Eph 2:14) and heals any broken relationship in the common home. He “is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light.” [221]

Jesus does not limit himself to verbal communication: He is the incarnate Word and speaks with authority. (Lk 4:32) He “came to accompany us on the journey of life” [235] and, therefore, he adjusts fully “to his people’s way of talking and to their patterns of thought.” (CP 11) Using simple gestures, he heals lepers (Mt 8:3) and the sick, (Mk 1:41) places his hands on children and blesses them, (Mk 10:16) liberates people from loneliness and marginalization.²⁰ All his words, actions, choices, and feelings are human language that he, as Incarnate Word, has made his own in order to communicate with us. His entire person (with his physical corporality) is the language par excellence that he uses to communicate God’s love for us and for creation.²¹

1.2. The human person is a dialogical and relational being

Divine revelation is dialogic: it calls upon us, asks for an answer, requires an interlocutor who listens to it and accepts it. God does not speak to the void. In Christ, the human beings are the addressees of God’s self-communication. When they had not yet existed and, therefore, could deserve nothing, God called them to participate in the Trinitarian dialogue, making them listeners of the Word; that is, those who host the Word as Mary did. Out of nothing, they were called to a loving dialogue with the Trinitarian God. Therefore, rather than “rational animal,” man is a free, dialogic, and relational being.

The human being exists because God calls him, summons him, and be-friends him. Indeed, “the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take

¹⁹ CP 10. “Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, «Pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*,» [=GS] Dec. 7, 1965, n. 22, in AAS 58 (1966) 1025-1120.

²⁰ Jn 9:6. Cf. R. CHEAIB, «La gestualità di Gesù comunicatore: prospettive sul mediatore multi-mediale,» in J.M. ALDAY, ed., *Nuovi media e vita consacrata*, Ancora, Milano 2011, 25-55, here 32-33.

²¹ On the “affective” language of Jesus: V. BATTAGLIA, «L’umano di Gesù di Nazareth: ri-dire l’evento dell’incarnazione in dialogo con le scienze antropologiche. Puntualizzazioni orientative,» in *Ricerche Teologiche* 27/2 (2016) 325-351.

them into fellowship with Himself.”²² In the actual progress of history, every human being is personally invited to a loving dialogue with his Creator. When, moved by the Spirit, he accepts this invitation, he enters into the mystery of the Trinitarian communion through Christ, the incarnate Word.

Establishing authentic relationships, people “make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them.” They grow more, mature more, and are sanctified more to the extent that they go out “from themselves to live in communion with God, with others, and with all creatures.” [240]

1.3. Unity in diversity

True communication seeks unity in diversity; i.e., it respects and supports every person’s individuality. Instead of objectifying and dominating, it recognizes, welcomes, and contemplates. The respect for individuality makes communion possible, whereas individualism leads to competitive relationships and prevents the normal development of one’s own personality.

The encyclical *Laudato Si’* emphasizes the need to respect individuality in order to foster unity and communion. All living beings “have a value of their own in God’s eyes,” [69] “are linked by unseen bonds,” [89] depend on each other, [86] and no one is self-sufficient. Indeed, “each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous.” [84] Besides, “valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.” [155]

In its symbolic and narrative language, the first chapter of Genesis describes creation as setting up the basis for authentic communication.²³ Through the Word, God establishes each being in its right place and function, setting clearly its peculiarity, characteristics, and limits. Thus, each creature is clearly identifiable, unique. Having ensured a rich diversity, He also guarantees unity by including all creatures in a network of harmonious relationships, in which each one finds its specific function, utility, and fecundity.²⁴ Thus, the initial chaos turns into cosmos, becoming a welcoming space for the free and affectionate encounter. God manifests joy and satisfaction at having created this space for communion and dialogue.²⁵

²² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, «Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*,» [=DV] Nov. 18, 1965, n. 2, in AAS 58 (1966) 817-835.

²³ Cf. LS 66. These biblical comments in more detail: M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, *Sister Mother Earth*, 174-178.

²⁴ Cf. A. WÉNIN, *Da Adamo ad Abramo o l’errare dell’uomo. Lettura narrativa e antropologica della Genesi. I Gn 1,1-12,4*, EDB, Bologna 2008.

²⁵ “God saw that it was good.” Gn 1:25; After creating man, God “found it very good” Gn 1:31.

1.4. Creation is language, communication, encounter, relationship

Creation is the historical, loving, and free expression of the Supreme Good.²⁶ Communicating his Trinitarian goodness, God gives origin to all beings in Christ.²⁷ In addition to being the efficient cause, Christ is also the final cause, since all creatures are ontologically bound to him, with a kind of *potentia oboedientialis*,²⁸ and tend towards him as their ultimate end.²⁹ Everything speaks of God.³⁰

Having its origin in the Word, creation is language, communication, encounter, relationship. It is a concretization of God's love in time and, therefore, it "is of the order of love." [77]

1.4.1. Each creature bears in itself a Trinitarian structure

Each creature is a sacrament of the Trinitarian life and "reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness."³¹ Therefore, to know the world, we must see it from God and, on the other hand, to know God we have to contemplate the world.

Bonaventure "teaches us that each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure"³² and "testifies that God is three." [239] Hence, we can read creation using this key. Sin has blurred our vision and has deprived us of that original innocence which enabled us to perceive immediately, in each creature, the reflection of the Trinity.

The mystic perceives nature's interconnectedness and harmony, "not because the finite things of this world are really divine, but because he experi-

²⁶ Cf. L. ARTUSO DA FARA, «La espiritualidad de San Bonaventura,» in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 3/7 (1974) 79-85.

²⁷ BONAVENTURE, «Commentaria in II librum Sententiarum,» [=2*Sent.*] d.1 p.2, a.1. q.1 (*Quaracchi* II 40).

²⁸ DUNS SCOTUS, «Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis,» [=Q*Metaph.*] IX q.12 n.11, in ID., *Opera philosophica*, [=O*Ph.*] IV 614.

²⁹ Cf. DUNS SCOTUS, «Quodlibet,» [=Q*uodl.*] q.19 n.15, in L. VIVÈS, ed., Paris 1891-1895, [=Vivès] XXV-XXVI.

³⁰ BONAVENTURE, «Itinerarium mentis in Deum,» [=I*tin.*] c.2 n.12 (*Quaracchi* V 302-303); ID., «Commentarius in librum Ecclesiastes,» [=I*n Eccl.*] c.1 v.11 q.2,3 (*Quaracchi* VI 16.24).

³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [=CCC] n. 339, LEV, Vatican City 1997.

³² LS 239. "Creatura mundi est quasi quidem liber, in quo relucet et repraesentatur et legitur Trinitas fabricatrix." BONAVENTURE, «Breviloquium,» [=B*revil.*] II c.12 (*Quaracchi* V 230a).

ences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that «all things are God.»³³

1.4.2. Everything has been created for the communicative encounter

“Everything is created so that this story can exist, the encounter between God and his creature.”³⁴ By the power of the Holy Spirit, the loving presence of Christ in every creature makes possible a close network of relationships that reflects the Trinitarian mystery.

All of us are the fruit of the Trinitarian love and are naturally oriented to self-giving. Therefore, we need to promote a holistic perspective that enhances the relationship and interdependence among all beings.

Underlining the holistic, relational, and communicative dimension of creation, Teilhard de Chardin affirms that “the earth has a physiognomy, a countenance, a face.” A time will come when all beings will have “a heart and a soul.”³⁵

2. Restoring communication in the common home

Contradicting the Christian vision of the human person, modern culture has assumed a negative anthropological conception (*homo homini lupus*) that leads to a dialectic of perennial conflict at all levels. By subordinating his own body, (ontological dualism) man has also despised creation (ontic dualism). These “unhealthy dualisms”³⁶ have accentuated the separation between humans and the other creatures, thus opening the way to a despotic and irresponsible anthropocentrism.³⁷ Indeed, “thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.” [155] Thus, “human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another.” [106]

³³ LS 234; JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Cántico espiritual*, XIV-XV, in ID., *Canciones, coplas, declaraciones*, ISU, Milano 1998, 5.

³⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, August 6, 2008, in *Ecclesia* 3436 (2008) 26.

³⁵ P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *The Vision of the Past*, Collins, London 1966, 26 y 45.

³⁶ Those “unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history” LS 98.

³⁷ On the thesis of human exception: J.M. SCHAEFFER, *El fin de la excepción humana*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires 2009; M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, «Franciscan spirituality and integral ecology.» 60-62.

Moreover, *Laudato Si'* warns about the danger of misusing Information and Communication Technologies. [=ICT] These wonderful technical means are God's gifts, but, on their own, cannot guarantee a human and humanizing communication. One thing is the technology we use (technical dimension) and another the ethical aspects that its use implies (anthropological dimension). The technical dimension of communication must not be confused with the anthropological dimension. At the anthropological level, the communication challenges have been basically the same throughout history, despite the *ICT* having continually changed and evolved.

2.1. Sin and ecological conversion

The ecological crisis is an ethical crisis, as it has been provoked "by our irresponsible and selfish behavior."³⁸ Environmental problems have ethical and spiritual roots, [9] because, ultimately, they are the result of the wounded human heart. (WDC 2016) Therefore, we must highlight our connection with the earth and our need for reconciliation with it.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* introduced the concept of ecological sin, until then barely used in Catholic theology.³⁹ "God gave us the earth «to till and to keep» (Gn 2:15) in a balanced and respectful way. To till too much, to keep too little, is to sin." (WDC 2016, 2)

The abusive and selfish exploitation of the earth "is a crime against ourselves and a sin against God." [8] Thus, humans are endangering the whole ecosystem and their own future.

2.1.1. Sin breaks communication and communion

The book of Genesis illustrates that sin breaks our four fundamental relationships: with our self, God, others, and creation. Instigated by the deceiver, Adam and Eve deny their creatural condition and break their four relationships: they accuse each other, feel ashamed of their own nakedness, stop perceiving the cosmos as a welcoming garden, and no longer walk with God in it. (Gn 3)

³⁸ FRANCIS, «Message for the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*,» [=WDC] Sept. 1, 2016, n. 1, in *OR* 200 (Sept. 2, 2016) 8.

³⁹ "La tierra profanada por tantos pecados." CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ARGENTINA, «Una tierra para todos,» Cea, Buenos Aires 2005, 5; CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF BOLIVIA, «El universo, don de Dios para la vida,» CEB, La Paz 2012, nn. 51, 70. On the different ways of presenting ecological sin: E.M. CONRADIE, «Towards an ecological reformulation of the Christian doctrine of sin,» in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 122 (2005) 4-22, here 16-17.

“The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. [...] As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual. [...] Today “sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.” [66]

The infidelity of sin breaks the person internally, damages social life, destroys the ecosystem, and endangers life itself. [70] The confusion of Babel (Gn 11) clearly shows this lack of communication. Not accepting serenely their condition of creatures, humans want to get away from God, are unable to understand each other, generate violence,⁴⁰ and pervert nature, causing the destruction of the universal flood. (Gn 6-7)

By sinning, man contradicts his own nature of “listener of the Word.” The pharaoh embodies this egotistical enclosure that blocks communication. His not listening is synonymous with not believing: “Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?” (Ex 5:2) Not listening to God, he cuts off communication with others and provokes the ten plagues.⁴¹

When the exodus began, the chosen people discovers soon the difficulty of establishing and keeping dialogue with God, who is a completely diverse being that they cannot control or domesticate. Israel gets tired of a communication that requires listening, waiting, opening up to the one who remains elusive, mysterious, diverse. In place of the personal God, they choose “a molten calf,”⁴² tangible, tame, reassuring, while they long for the onions and garlic that the slavery in Egypt ensured them.⁴³ Indeed, dialogic freedom is always demanding, difficult; therefore, the perennial temptation of rejecting it to establish relations of domination or submission.

2.1.2. *Ecological conversion*

“Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue.” [217] Therefore, “we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions.”

⁴⁰ Gn 4; “The earth is filled with violence through them;” (Gn 6:13) LS 70.

⁴¹ Ex 7-11. “I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go.” (Ex 5:2) “Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen to them.” Ex 7:13.22; 8:11.15; 9:12.

⁴² “A god who will go before us.” Ex 32:1.

⁴³ “We remember the fish we used to eat without cost in Egypt, and the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” Nm 11:5.

[218] The awareness of our responsibility must lead us to “take concrete steps towards ecological conversion,”⁴⁴ overcoming avarice and consumerism. Besides, we must grow in ecological virtues: compassion, prudence, temperance, simplicity, sobriety, and “the capacity to be happy with little.”⁴⁵

Conversion must be “sustained particularly by the sacrament of Penance.” (WDC 2016, 2) Unfortunately, when confessing our sins, we often disregard our responsibility “in relation to other living beings.” [68]

2.2. “Do not be afraid of new technologies!”

“Do not be afraid of new technologies!”⁴⁶ John Paul II warned. They are “gifts”⁴⁷ that “God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use, and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny.” (RS 14) The Church “would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize” them. (EN 45) Rather than reducing them to simple tools in our hands, we must acknowledge that they have already created a new culture, a living environment where every one of us is immersed. We must learn how to inhabit it properly.

The MCS strengthen the fraternal bonds of the human family, foster collaboration and solidarity in dealing with serious and urgent matters, shed light on abuses, stimulate progress and responsible competition, and serve as a channel for spiritual enrichment and ethical reflection.⁴⁸ However, there are also challenges that require continuous discernment, constant vigilance, and a healthy critical capacity. (RS 13) Let us now analyze some of the challenges that the encyclical *Laudato Si'* indicates.

⁴⁴ WDC 2016, 2 First use of this concept in Catholic theology: JOHN PAUL II, «General Audience» Jan. 17, 2001; cf. N. ORMEROD - C. VANIN, «Ecological Conversion: What does it mean?» in *Theological Studies* 77/2 (2016) 328-352, here 330.

⁴⁵ LS 222; cf. V.-T. CACIUC, «The Role of Virtue Ethics in Training Students' Environmental Attitude.» in *Procedia* 92 (2013) 122-127, here 123. “Cosmic humility”: R. BAUCKHAM, *Bible and Ecology. Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Longman, London 2010, 37.

⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, «Apostolic Letter *Il Rapido Sviluppo*.» Jan. 24, 2005, [=RS] n. 14, in AAS 97 (2005) 265-274.

⁴⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, «Decree *Inter mirifica*.» [=IM] Dec. 4, 1963, n. 1-2, in AAS 56 (1964) 145-157; RM 37; PAUL VI, «Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.» [=EN] Dec 8, 1975, n. 45, in AAS 58 (1976) 5-76; PCSC, «Ethics in communications.» 4-06-2000, n. 4, in OR (May 31, 2000) suppl., inserto tabloid, p. I-IV; “The marvelous providence of God has reserved this wonder for our age.” 7th WCD 1973.

⁴⁸ Cf. P.J. ROSSI – P. SOUKUP, *Mass media and the moral imagination. Communication, culture and theology*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas 1994, 4; R.E. LAUDER, «Business, cinema and sin.» in *Teaching Business Ethics* 6 (2002) 63-72.

2.2.1. *A critical approach to the media*

The references of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* to the *MCS* are contained in the fourth part of the first chapter, [43-47] entitled “Decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society.” In this chapter, *LS* considers the negative effects of the current model of development, [43] which promotes chaotic and unhealthy cities, [44] privatizes beautiful spaces, reserving them for the rich, [45] increases inequalities, breaks the bonds of social cohesion, and generates violence. [46] Among all these challenges, the encyclical points out the influence of the *MCS*. [47]

A critical view of the *MCS* is evident here. They respond to the commercial interests of the multinationals that control them and promote the same capitalist model of development that has caused the current socio-environmental crisis. This critical approach to the *MCS* contrasts with the optimism of a recent UN document,⁴⁹ which affirms that “the guarantee of diffusion and access to information sources seems to be sufficient in itself for the promotion of a healthy sustainable development”⁵⁰ for the coming years.

Laudato Si', instead, affirms that the *MCS* can manipulate human perception, especially when they “become omnipresent” and when relationships with others are “replaced by a type of internet communication.” [47] These statements reflect an evolution in the Church’s theoretical approach to the *MCS*.

2.2.2. *From neutral instruments to reality configurators*

S.E. Cardinal Martini taught that the *MCS* are not just tools in our hands, but rather “an atmosphere, an environment in which we are immersed, that surrounds us and penetrates us from every side.”⁵¹ John Paul II added: “it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications.”⁵²

⁴⁹ UNITED NATIONS, [=UN] «Transforming our world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.» in *Internet*: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>. [Last visit: Sept. 27, 2018]

⁵⁰ F. COLOMBO, «Media and information in the *Laudato Si'*» in *Educatio Catholica* 4 (2017) 41-49, here 49.

⁵¹ C.M. MARTINI, «Pastoral letter “*Il lembo del mantello*”: per un incontro tra Chiesa e mass media.» Centro Ambrosiano, Milano 1991, 12. [my translation]

⁵² *RM* 37. Today “one no longer thinks or speaks of social communications as mere instruments or technologies. Rather they are now seen as part of a still unfolding culture.” 24th *WCD*, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIII, 1 (1990) 157-161.

In any case, from Vatican II until the last decade, the Pope's messages for the World Communications Day tend to see the media as "lifeless instruments requiring proper use."⁵³ Therefore, it is up to us to use them for good or for bad. The *WCD* messages emphasized mainly that the *MCS* are ethically neutral, even if those messages also insisted on the need for educating our conscience in order to use the media in a responsible way, because their pervasiveness could condition our vision of the world.

In the last decade, however, the *WCD* messages underline much more clearly that we are in a new living environment that, in many aspects, is determined by the influence of the *MSC*. "The impartiality of media is merely an appearance." (48th *WCD*, 2014) We are already in a new culture, a new existential context that needs to be evangelized. "There is no area of human experience in which the media have not become an integral part of interpersonal relations and of social, economic, political, and religious development." (42nd *WCD*, 2008, 1) Therefore, it is necessary to enculturate the gospel in this new social context with innovative and creative approaches in theology and ethics.

Giving us mental representations ready to use, the new *MSC* are shaping our perception of reality and our symbolic understanding of the world.⁵⁴ Even if we are not aware of it, they are conditioning the whole society and our own lifestyle. However, rather than putting barriers, we need to discern the best way of inhabiting this anthropologically qualified space that the *MCS* have created, discerning the ideals and values that are at stake.

2.2.3. *Mental and media pollution*

Laudato Si' affirms that "true wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue, and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data, which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution." [47] Indeed, an overload of data can prevent us from structuring our thinking and an excessive amount of information can create confusion instead of increasing our knowledge.

Information should bring us to knowledge and wisdom, but often the *MSC* use it as an end in itself. "Amid the noise and distractions of an information

⁵³ "The communications media are only lifeless instruments requiring proper use." PCSC, «An appeal to all contemplative religious.» June 3, 1973, in *Internet*: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/peccs/documents/rc_pc_peccs_doc_03061973_contemplative-religious_en.html.

⁵⁴ Cf. H. RHEINGOLD, *La realtà virtuale. I mondi artificiali generati dal computer e il loro potere di trasformare la società*, Baskerville, Bologna 1993, 521-522; F. SCHIRRMACHER, *La libertà ritrovata. Come (continuare a) pensare nell'era digitale*, Codice, Torino 2010.

overload,” [47] we are given countless answers, but we are unable to formulate the right questions. In fact, “the speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgement, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression.” (48th WCD, 2014) Baricco speaks of the “new barbarians” who prefer speed to reflection.⁵⁵ The continuous flow of data and the lack of reflection can lead us to superficiality and to cultural impoverishment, bringing about confusion and disorientation.

Instant communication makes it difficult to process our experiences inwardly and to assimilate them thoughtfully. Thus, it is difficult to learn “how to live wisely, to think deeply, and to love generously.” [47]

The media environment is increasingly polluted and could become unbreathable, due to manipulation and lack of transparency. The Pope has dedicated the last WCD message to the proliferation of “fake news”; i.e., “false information based on non-existent or distorted data meant to deceive and manipulate the reader.” (52nd WCD, 2018, 1) In this way, people disregard truth to promote selfish interests.

2.3. The media facilitate (and shape) our relationships

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* affirms that the risks associated with the MCS become more challenging when real relationships are replaced “by a type of internet communication.” [47]

Virtual communication “enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim,” [47] thus hindering the construction of our own identity and the serene encounter with others. Fleeing into the virtual, the subject moves away from his own self, from his neighbors, and from his physical and cultural environment.⁵⁶

2.3.1. Loneliness, indifference, and lack of empathy

“In a culture often dominated by technology, sadness and loneliness appear to be on the rise.”⁵⁷ It is also growing “a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations.” [47] David Riesman uses the expression “a lonely crowd” to refer to insecure, consumerist, and anxious individuals who seek

⁵⁵ A. BARICCO, *I barbari. Saggio sulla mutazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2006, 178.

⁵⁶ A. HELLER, *Dove siamo a casa?*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1998; G. BETTETINI – C. GIACCARDI – P. AROLDI, «Identità, comunicazione e società multiculturale.» in V. CESAREO, *Per un dialogo interculturale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2001, 86.

⁵⁷ FRANCIS, «Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*.» Nov. 20, 2016, n. 3, in AAS 108 (2016) 1311-1327.

emotional refuge in the private realm, disregard public life, and uncritically follow the media.⁵⁸

“Today’s media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections.” [47] It is therefore paradoxical that their most frequent users tend to be the less empathetic ones.⁵⁹ This confirms that technology facilitates virtual contact, but cannot guarantee empathy, which belongs to the anthropological dimension of communication. Indeed, “when we allow ourselves to be caught up in superficial information, instant communication, and virtual reality, we can waste precious time and become indifferent to the suffering flesh of our brothers and sisters.”⁶⁰ Quite often, the relationships established on social networks remain superficial and inconsistent, without any commitment or responsibility.

2.3.2 Artificial emotions

Laudato Si’ warns about the dangers of a communication that often gives rise “to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.” [47]

Already in the ludic society of the Roman Empire, which kept people anesthetized and quiet by offering them “bread and circuses,”⁶¹ the Church Fathers warned against the ambivalence of public shows, because they blurred the distinction between true and false, making evanescent the criteria of truth. (*ratio veritatis*⁶²) People can thus become spectators or actors in a pseudo reality with no ontological consistency, in which everyone is driven by irresponsible cu-

⁵⁸ D. RIESMAN, *The lonely crowd*, New Haven, London 1961.

⁵⁹ On the rapid decline of empathy among university students, especially from 2001 onwards: S. KONRATH - E.H. O’BRIEN - C. HSING, «Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students over Time: a Meta-analysis,» in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15/2 (2011) 180-198.

⁶⁰ FRANCIS, «Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*,» [=GE] March 19, 2018, LEV, Vatican City 2018, n. 108.

⁶¹ In the first century, the poet Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis lamented the populism of the Roman emperors, who kept people anesthetized and quiet by using “bread and circuses”: “Iam pridem, ex quo suffragia nulli uendimus, effudit curas; nam qui dabat olim imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat, panem et circenses.” D. IUNII IUVENALIS SATURA X, 77-81, edited by P. Campana, Mondadori, Firenze 2004, 63.

⁶² Tertullian (155-240) affirmed that those shows were unsuitable for Christians, since they contradicted the “*ratio veritatis*” of the creation. Q.S.F. TERTULLIANUS, *De spectaculis*, cap. I, 1, Lipsiae 1839, 6.

riosity.⁶³ In this way, they endanger the “living in truth” that is a fundamental characteristic of God’s children.⁶⁴

“How is it that a man wants to be made sad by the sight of tragic sufferings that he could not bear in his own person? Yet the spectator does want to feel sorrow, and it is actually his feeling of sorrow that he enjoys. [...] How can the unreal sufferings of the stage possibly move pity? The spectator is not moved to aid the sufferer but merely to be sorry for him; and the more the author of these fictions makes the audience grieve, the better they like him.”⁶⁵

Nowadays, fun and diversion keep being used to anesthetize and manipulate people. Some authors have jokingly called the media: “weapons of mass distraction.”⁶⁶ The current socio-economic system does not invite us to think, but to buy. Aldous Huxley and Neil Postman have reminded us of it in a suggestive way.⁶⁷ Rather than striving to uncover and change the oppressive structures in our world, many people try to compensate their existential void with cosmetics, gyms, drugs, medicines, psychologists, diets, beverages, automobiles, and technological gadgets.⁶⁸

2.4. Far from nature, far from the poor

The “rapidification” [18] of the current technological society drives us to frenetic activity, to global indifference, and to ride rough-shod over everything around us. [225] The same media that facilitate virtual contact, can also “shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others, and the

⁶³ “Curiosity is characterized by a specific *not-staying* [Unverwellen] with what is nearest. Consequently, it also does not seek the leisure of reflective staying, rather it seeks restlessness and excitement [...] Curiosity has nothing to do with the contemplation that wonders at being, it has no interest in wondering to the point of not understanding.” M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, State Univ. of New York Press, Albany 2010, 166.

⁶⁴ L. LUGARESI, «I padri della Chiesa fra teatro e Internet.» in *OR* (Feb. 16, 2011) 4; cf. ID., *Il teatro di Dio. Il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico (II-IV secolo)*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008.

⁶⁵ ST AUGUSTINE, *The confessions of St Augustine*, III, 2, Sheed & Ward, London 1999, (4th reprint) 30-31.

⁶⁶ This was also the English title of a television movie commercialized in 1997. Cf. *Internet*: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120487/>. [Last visit: Aug. 20, 2018]

⁶⁷ N. POSTMAN, *Amusing ourselves to death. Public discourse in the age of show business*, Penguin, New York 2006; A. HUXLEY, *Brave new world*, Rosetta Books, New York 2010 (original 1932)

⁶⁸ F. PASQUALETTI, «Giovani, fede e vocazione cristiana nell’era della tecnologia digitale.» in *Salesianum* 79 (2017) 231-256, here 252. [My translation]

complexity of their personal experiences.” [47] In this way, we lose empathy, solidarity, and capacity to contemplate creation. Even media professionals are often too detached from the concrete reality that they are reporting.

“Many professionals, opinion makers, communications media, and centres of power are located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. [...] This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality.” [49]

Being physically removed from the reality they describe, some professionals fall into a “green” rhetoric, which is clearly fragmented and insensitive to the suffering of the poor. Instead, “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach,” [49] because everything is connected. Actually, “a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.” [8]

Conclusion

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* proposes Francis of Assisi as a model of integral ecology, [10] because “he communed with all creation” and “every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.” [11] Communication and integral ecology always go together. Growing up in our union with Christ, we strengthen our ties with the poor, with sister mother earth, and with the whole creation. We are one in Christ. (Eph 2:11-16)

This affectionate and universal brotherhood is radically opposed to capitalism and to the technocratic paradigm, which consider “everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests.” [122] Creation is reduced to something formless, completely open to manipulation. [106] Instead of fraternal relationships, capitalism promotes the “non-tuism”, which portrays the others as anonymous and faceless adversaries. Everyone must defeat or deceive the others if he wants to survive and progress.

The media and the digital world respond to the commercial logic of the multinationals that control them and, therefore, present many ethical challenges. We have analyzed some of these challenges in the light of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In any case, the real dilemma does not consist in deciding whether to use the Means of Social Communication or not, but rather in using them responsibly. They offer enormous potentialities to communicate “knowledge and affections;” therefore, “efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches.” [47]

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* invites us to conversion, active commitment, and hope. Christ “does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth.” [245] Helped by divine grace, we can restore communication in the common home, thus anticipating the advent of new heavens and a new earth. (2 Pet 3:13)

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