ENVIRONMENTALISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: A CASE OF THE ENCYCLICAL LAUDATO SI'

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt has been made to contextualize the ecological dimension of contemporary Catholic social teaching. With this aim in mind, the authors discuss the merits of several theories and approaches (political economy approaches, ecological modernization theory, environmental justice theory, and social constructionism) coming from environmental sociology and other disciplinary traditions in the social sciences. After an analysis of relevant historical documents of Catholic social teaching with respect to the environmental issues covered by them, the authors discuss the main lines of argument present in the recent (2015) encyclical Laudato Si' (Pope Francis) and interpret them in the aforementioned theoretical framework. In conclusion, the usefulness of Catholic social teaching for the public dialogue between science and other relevant stakeholders, as well as its main strengths and weaknesses have been discussed.

Keywords: Catholic social teaching, Laudato Si', environmental sociology, development, environment, ecological crisis

1. Introduction

Environmental[1] issues and environmental crisis have been a prominent topic in the social sciences in the last couple of decades. Ecological issues are widely present in Catholic social teaching (usually abbreviated as: CST), they are also often commented in theological discourse, and presumably have a significant influence on environmental attitudes of the members of the Catholic Church and possibly wider public. However, CST is rarely discussed in the framework of environmental sociology theories and other disciplinary traditions (ecological and environmental economics, environmental law, environmental psychology, etc.). In this paper, we try to fill in the gaps by proceeding beyond pure comments on the ecological dimension of CST, and moving towards an integrative understanding of CST ecological writings. A direct motivation for the paper comes from the encyclical *Laudato Si'* issued by Pope Francis in the previous year (2015). This encyclical presents a further development in the already coherent and recognizable ecological teaching of the Catholic Church. By comparing *Laudato Si'* and other documents with "secular" environmental theories and approaches, we try to point

out their differences and similarities and to evaluate whether and to what extent Catholic social teaching can contribute to the theoretical foundations of the environmental social sciences or enrich the current debates on the social and cultural dimensions of environmental issues.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide for a brief overview of the theoretical perspectives in environmental sociology and similar disciplinary traditions. Then we try to evaluate the importance of CST and its environmental dimension. In concluding chapters, we analyse the main lines of argument in the *Laudato Si'* interpreting them within the framework of the aforementioned theories.

2. Environmental theories in social sciences

Despite their natural basis, there is no doubt that "environmental problems are fundamentally social problems: They result from human social behaviour, they are viewed as problematic because of their impact on humans (as well as other species), and their solution requires societal effort" (Dunlap and Marshall, 2007: 329). Dunlap and Marshall (2007) employ the three-function model which analytically separates three general functions of the bio-physical environment for the human society: serving as a source of resources needed for sustaining life, serving as a waste disposal depository, and providing humans with a habitat. In their opinion, notwithstanding its simplicity, "the model clarifies the characteristics and sources of environmental problems, how they change over time, and thus the expanding foci of environmental sociological research" (Dunlap and Marshall, 2007: 331). Ecological problems arise when these three functions contradict each other, when humans over-use the resources, or when the capabilities of the ecosystems are not able to meet the demands posed by human society. In addition to this general framework, various theories and approaches have been developed in the social sciences in the course of the last several decades. As arguably the most essential ones, we have selected political economy approaches, ecological modernization theory, environmental justice theory, and constructionism.

Schnaiberg's (1980) model of the treadmill of production is widely considered as one of the first works that can be depicted as an application of **political economy** to the environmental issues. For him, environmental problems arise as a logical consequence of the capitalist production system that depends on the constant economic growth motivated by the profit motive. To put it briefly, the system is arranged alongside the necessity of growth, wherein all institutions and social actors are dependent on it. Such a production system also brings about cultural uniformization, erasing the differences between various localities and population groups (e.g., differences between urban and rural population) (Šundalić and Pavić, 2008).

An entirely different strand of research, theories of consumerism and consumer society, draws on the similar foundations, i.e. on the growth dependence. However, consumerism scholars (e.g., Hromadžić, 2008; Lipovetsky, 2007) place more emphasis on consumer motivations, i.e. on the exchange value of products that is constitutive of the identity in the consumer society. Marketing and media industries stimulate growth of "wishes" over "needs", thus fuelling the growth and the subsequent environmental disbalance.

On the other hand, "world-systems" authors try to incorporate the environment and environmental issues into their vision of historical capitalism as a dynamical process of structuring and re-structuring of the world-system. According to Wallerstein (1974), the modern world-system arose from a crisis of the feudal system through the new geographical division of labour between core, semi-periphery and periphery countries. The so-called core countries (mainly Western countries) benefit from such a structure by exporting manufactured goods with higher cost/higher levels of added value and exchanging them for cheaper raw materials coming from periphery countries, while countries of the semi-periphery occupy the middle position. Capitalism structured as a world-system appears to incorporate an uneven and unbalanced process of development wherein different geographical regions occupy their differentially rewarding roles. Subsequent authors working in the framework of this paradigm acknowledged a need to include the environment into explanations of the internal functioning of the capitalist world-system. For example, Moore (2011) posits that capitalism externalized nature as a source of raw production inputs by globally expanding time-space compression and unification, making the time linear and the space flat and homogenous. Moore even underscores a need of abandoning the Cartesian Nature/Society division, and pleads for a conceptualization of capitalism as environmental history.

To briefly summarize political economy approaches, the issue of the ecological crisis cannot be separated from the question of global justice. As pointed out by Mazo (2015: 206), the development of the West is subsidized in several ways that are unjust. First, industrialization based on the combustion of fossil fuels spurred climate change that affects the whole planet, including those parts of the world that have not enjoyed large benefits from it (developing countries). Second, the West imported industrial goods that require extraction of resources and pollution, thus "exporting" environmental problems into the developing countries. Thirdly, the growth of the West in the past couple of centuries has taken place at the expense of the quality of life, and perhaps the survival of future generations.

As pointed out by two of the most acknowledged proponents of this theory, Arthur P. J. Mol and Gert Spaargaren (2009: 253), the **ecological modernization theory** arose from the social context of the 1980s, which was conducive to deregulation partly due to failures of the state-control mechanism of combating the environmental crisis. For them, the essence of EMT resides in the idea of a separate ecological rationality that can be differentiated from the other rationalities. The ecological rationality materialized itself in various institutional changes, such as governmental bodies in charge of environmental issues, ecological non-governmental organizations and the changes in political ideologies that incorporated green ideas and made old political ideologies somewhat obsolete. As summarized in Carolan (2007), for the ecological modernization theory, the solution of ecological crisis does not reside in de-modernization, but in *more* modernization and rationalization. This theory pushes for more flexible regulation regimes, polluter pays and precautionary principles and greener technologies. Thus, the theory does not question the fundamentals of the capitalist economy; it just opts for more "nature-friendly" production technologies that lead to a sustainable development that encompasses the ecological principles. As such, the ecological modernization theory tends to downplay the importance of over-consumption issues, over-emphasizing the dematerialized nature of the contemporary digital economy (Carolan, 2007).

Notwithstanding the fact that the ecological modernisation theory has been refined and reconstructed during the years, Hannigan (2006) posits that its most significant deficiencies still remain in place. The theory still depends on an uncorroborated technological optimism, i.e. it is premised on an idea that technology is becoming greener and environmentally neutral. This theory also tends to underscore the politico-economical dimension of ecological modernisation. In Hannigan's (2006: 26) own words, "…what can be sustained is only what political and social forces in a particular historical alignment define as acceptable". Ecological modernisation theory also fails to address the so-called Jevons paradox (York and Rosa, 2003). Namely, even if it would be true that energy and resource inputs per unit of output tend to decrease in the process of ecological modernization and dematerialisation of the "superindustralized" economy, this would not mean that total energy and resource inputs are decreasing. Available evidence seems to corroborate the notion that efficiency increases lead to the increased use of resources due to the profit seeking that accelerate the "treadmill of production" (for a review of the findings, see York and Rosa, 2003).

The environmental justice research tradition began in the United States by exploring differential demographic exposure to environmental hazards, especially when toxic waste is concerned. In its beginnings, this research determined that lower class and minority groups (especially racial ones) are disproportionately affected by unhealthy exposure, even though causal directions are not always clear and easily discernible (for an overview, see Weinberg, 1998). Subsequent research and theoretical contributions have significantly broadened the scope of environmental and policy issues that fall under the category of environmental justice. Besides environmental hazards, research on environmental (in)justice included access to environmental amenities and other kind of environment in which citizens live (parks, open spaces, working places etc.), differential treatment by public authorities, ignorance of mainstream environmental organizations when it comes to problems of disenfranchised parts of population, and other types of inequalities that should be analysed with environmental inequalities (Downey, 2005).

Additionally, it is necessary to differentiate between disparate exposure, disparate health impacts, disparate social impacts and the relative distribution of burdens versus benefits (Downey, 2005: 353-354). To be more precise, differential exposure might not be necessarily present in order for environmental injustice to exist. For example, health effects on

various social groups might be different (e.g., due to unequal health services availability). In other cases, social impacts add up to disparate exposure, for example by lowering the property values and levels of economic activity in the local community exposed to environmental hazards. As emphasized by Downey, relative distribution inequality always exists in cases where the social groups that enjoy more benefits from the capitalist social relations (i.e., current organization of the economy) do not receive a disproportionate burden of environmental damage that is part of the aforementioned social relations.

As noted by Schlosberg (2013), in recent years environmental justice has been linked to the idea of sustainable materialism. As opposed to the reactive nature of earlier versions of environmental justice, sustainable materialism puts environmental justice in the framework of building just and sustainable everyday life with regard to ecological resources. The prominent examples include local community-building in terms of local food markets and collective gardening, local energy production and more demand for green jobs in the local community (Schlosberg, 2013: 48-49).

Even though it is often misinterpreted as an example of denial of real (ontological) existence of ecological problems, **constructionism** posits that environmental conditions translate into perceived environmental risks only after social, political and cultural processes in which they are defined as such (Hannigan, 2006: 29). To put it in other words, environmental risks arise out of the discursive process wherein mutually contradictory claims about the state of the environment can be encountered. As Yearley (2002: 275) puts it, "there are more potential environmental problems than there is public attention and media coverage devoted to them". In order to gain better understanding of the constructionism, it is useful to distinguish between milder and more extreme versions of relativism (Klein, 2002). Extreme relativism denies the objective reality and implies that either all the statements are equally true or that none of them are true. In other words, objective reality arises from the process of social construction in such a way that we cannot even speak of the reality before the process happens. Milder forms of relativism don't deny the existence of reality, but only emphasize contexts of justification. As Klein (2002) noted, this kind of relativism is much more useful in the context of environmental sciences since it doesn't preclude the existence of situations where environmental claims are uncontested and can be studied in a positivist manner. Unjustified attacks on constructionism probably stem from the conflation of different types of constructionism. Thus, the construction of social reality, institutional construction, the construction of knowledge and the social construction of objective reality are often mixed-up together under the term "constructionism" (Demeritt, 2006).

To sum up, constructionism contends that in most environmental issues there are mutually contradictory contested claims that fight for legitimacy. Yearley presents a well-known case of the planned sea sinking of the Brent Spar oil platform in 1995. Facing bad publicity and a potential consumer boycott, the oil company Shell abandoned their aforementioned plan. Notwithstanding the fact that the situation presented a potential environmental hazard, the public and media were not aware of the problem until a non-governmental environmental organization had launched a campaign and pushed the issue onto the public and media agenda. As Yearley emphasizes, at the same time there were many at least as important environmental issues, such as public transportation pollution, that were not present in the public discourse. This example shows that constructionism is not to be understood as a deconstruction of the real existence of environmental issues, but as an analytical approach that warns that all risks are inevitably socially constructed, and that the conscious or unconscious agenda of various social actors should be taken into account.

3. Catholic social teaching and its significance

As emphasized by Becker and van der Zweerde (2013), the entire history of Christianity can be pictured as an oscillation between rejection of the "sinful" world and a quest for transcendence, on the one hand, and active attempts to shape the world /society according to the Christian principles. In between of these extreme positions there is a third way that tries to change the world, but also to never become too close to social and political ideologies and secular interests. Catholic social teaching arises precisely from the connection between social activism and social justice, on the one hand, and a life led by virtues, on the other (Sullivan, 1998: 14).

The attitude of the Catholic Church towards social and economic changes had been defensive and conservative throughout the entire 19th century. As a

manifest of antimodernity the *Syllabus* of Pope Pius IX can be pointed out, wherein the Pope criticizes and rejects many liberal ideas, such as freedom of religion and the separation of the church and state. A significant change comes with the pontificate of Leo XIII, especially with his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which represents the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching. In this encyclical the Pope pleads for an improvement of the working class living conditions, particularly having in mind the growth of the socialist ideology of the time. *Rerum Novarum* became a reference point for all subsequent papal social encyclicals that have further developed the CST, such as *Mater et Magistra* (1961, John XXIII) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971, Paul VI).

Since the Second Vatican Council there have been a couple of significant social changes that demanded fresh answers from Catholic social teaching, but they also have pointed to the significance of CST (Thomas, 2010). According to Thomas, the first of these changes apply to the global rise of religion, which usually happens as a response to modernization failures of secular states and ideologies. Another change relates to the globalization which brings a kind of convergence and compression of space and time, but it also brings the local resistance to globalization, as well as its adaptation to local circumstances and traditions ("glocalization" in the terminology of Ronald Robertson). The third change relates to the changed nature of conflict and security in the modern world. The conflicts are increasingly becoming internal conflicts of the "weak" states that can no longer maintain order in their territory. In contrast to previous macro-interstate conflicts, the micro-conflicts in the form of civil wars and terrorism take the international stage.

According to Thomas (2010), Catholic social teaching can accommodate the new circumstances by using the concepts of personalism, subsidiarity and global justice as the foundations of development policies. In fact, personalism and subsidiarity, as constituent concepts of Catholic social teaching, more and more resonate with contemporary concepts of development that take into account local traditions, morality and civil society. Namely, the relational and the narrative concept of identity in the minds of many citizens, especially the ones living in underdeveloped countries, is opposed to the liberal Enlightenment idea of an autonomous citizen who follows his interests in the context of civil society. Therefore, development aid is best achieved through its grounding in local civil society organizations, mostly of a religious nature, and their moral concepts (Thomas, 2010: 26-28). As pointed out by Thomas (2010: 32), this doesn't mean that there are no moral values, but only that western enlightenment is not the only way to reach them. And finally, according to Thomas, Catholic social teaching underlines the multidimensionality of the development and a need not to include only its economic and political dimension, but also to preserve local identities. Attempts to ignore or oppress the local culture and identity can result in different kinds of terrorism, extremism and other forms of political instability (Thomas, 2010: 32).

4. Catholic social teaching and the environment

In his hypothesis, which subsequently has become eponymously known as the "Lynn White Thesis", White (1967) expressed a view that Christianity is a culprit for the ecological crisis, describing it "as the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen". In his own words, "modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful master over nature" (White, 1967: 1205). To put it briefly, White stated that the Christian God established rightful human dominance over nature, especially in the Occidental version of Christian theology that gives priority to action (sin as a moral deficiency) over thinking (sin as an intellectual deficiency). Sociological research that followed aimed at scrutinizing an empirical connection between religious worldviews and environmental attitudes and values brought about weak and inconclusive results (Berry, 2013). For example, Hope and Jones (2014) established that both the Christian and Muslim beliefs in the afterlife and divine intervention reduce the risk-perception of environmental issues. On the other hand, based on the results of their research, Djupe and Hunt (2009) conclude that the Christian worldview is not incompatible with holding pro-environmental attitudes, whereas Boyd (1999) found that religious variables have a very weak and diverse relationship with environmental attitudes[2]. Part of the explanation for the mixed results could be the vast diversity of Christianity itself, i.e. differences of the theological views of various Christian churches and denominations. For example, Catholic social teaching was very keen

to embrace new ecological thinking after it gained momentum in the 1960s.

Even though CST has been traditionally orientated towards the "social question", i.e. towards the issue of social justice, work and development, the environmental issue has become a cardinal part of the teaching from the second part of the 20th century. As early as 1971, the Synod of Bishops in a document called *Justice in the world* warned that the "delicate biosphere of the whole complex of all life on earth, are not infinite, but on the contrary must be saved and preserved as a unique patrimony belonging to all human beings"[3]. Environmental topics are extensively present in the social teaching of popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, considered by many as the "green popes".

In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), John Paul II fiercely condemns anthropocentrism stating that "man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption". Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian', and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer'[4]. This idea is further echoed in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), where the Pope integrates the concepts of development and ecology: "A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization - three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development"[5]. In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991), dedicated to the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II frames the ecological crisis into the context of consumerism. He underlines that in "… desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way"[6]. For him, the main cause of such a desire is the so-called anthropological error, wherein man forgets that natural resources are God's gift, and that he should not use them arbitrarily and without any restraint.

In his encyclical *Spe Salvi* Benedict XVI displays almost a catastrophic prognosis of the future of mankind. Namely, since the morality of the human species cannot advance and be accumulated in the same way as the progress of technology can, it can be inferred that the technological progress without ethics can represent a significant threat to mankind (Cain, 2012: 3). For Benedict XVI the nature of modernity is entailed in the epistemological program that rejects metaphysics and reduces knowledge to what can be known because it is made by men. Only that which is related to the power of doing, the praxis and technique is to be considered as knowledge. Such an epistemological program ultimately has had the political purpose of freeing man from all the givens of nature and enabling social progress through the autonomy of the individual and society. The final result of this development is that the modern man is free of all attachments to any moral and metaphysical purposes. Thus, man rejects God, but he also has to confront the void and the absurdity of human life. According to the Pope, this development frees up space for an uninterrupted rule of technique that can be used by human beings for their own purposes, while its rule cannot be questioned.

The environmental issue is further developed in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). In this document, Benedict XVI puts environmental problems in the context of integral development. For him, "in nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation"[7]. In line with the previous encyclicals, the Pope reflects on ecological problems in the context of the development taken as a world-system. In this sense, he emphasizes the problem of equitable energy distribution, pleading for a renewed solidarity and access to energy sources for developing countries. An important place is also given to the inter-generational justice and responsibility. In the Pope's words, "…we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it"[8]. In conclusion of the section dedicated to the environment and development, *Caritas in Veritate* "invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences"[9].

5. Laudato Si'

A choice of an entirely new name, which no pope had made since the 10th century, speaks of the re-

formist orientation of the new Pope, especially when one considers that it is the name of the Holy Francis taken by a Jesuit (Mayer, 2013). On the other hand, Pope Francis has continued a tendency towards an "informal" papacy, guided by the idea of service and connection with the faithful, at the expense of unnecessary lavish tributes and formal hierarchy. This tendency can be read from some of the moves of Francis' predecessors. Thus Paul VI renounced the tiara, Pope John Paul II the use of Papal carriers (so-called *sedia gestatoria*), while Benedict XVI even waived his pontificate (Mayer, 2013: 149).

Laudato Si' was published in 2015 and represents a continuation of the social teaching of the former two "green popes". It follows the already established structure of the social encyclicals by paying tribute to his predecessors and their writings, starting with John XXIII and his *Pacem in Terris*. However, in our opinion, given the complexity of the analysis and the in-depth coverage of all significant contemporary environmental topics, Laudato Si' might be the "greenest" document in the history of Catholic social teaching.

In the beginning of the encyclical the Pope also emphasizes that ecological concerns unite theology with science, philosophy and civil groups, and he even pays tribute to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and his ecological writings and pleas. Pope Francis also makes an environmental appeal by stating that "humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share"[10]. The appeal for a comprehensive dialogue is also present in the following quote: "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all"[11].

Pope Francis explicitly rejects alleged Judeo-Christian guilt for the anthropocentrism that is the cause of the environmental crisis (aforementioned "Lynn White thesis"). He posits that such a hypothesis stems from the flawed biblical hermeneutics (e.g., Book of Genesis) which doesn't consider biblical passages that testify that Man should treat the Earth and all living beings with the outmost care and responsibility respecting their dignity. For Pope Francis, the root cause of human maltreatment of nature is sin, wherein mankind broke its relationship with nature "by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations"[12]. He also references "pro-environmental traditions" inside the Church, such as St. Francis who "helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human"[13].

As the most pressing contemporary environmental issues the encyclical lists pollution and climate change, the issue of water and the loss of biodiversity. However, decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, as well as global inequality are mentioned and analysed alongside the environmental issues in the narrow sense.

In the fourth section of the encyclical, Pope Francis pays attention to the micro-level environmental degradation, i.e. to a connection between environmental and social degradation. He states that "nowadays, for example, we are conscious of the disproportionate and unruly growth of many cities, which have become unhealthy to live in, not only because of pollution caused by toxic emissions, but also as a result of urban chaos, poor transportation, and visual pollution and noise. Many cities are huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water. Neighbourhoods, even those recently built, are congested, chaotic and lacking in sufficient green space"[14]. A strong, even poignant condemnation of environmental injustice is visible in the following sentence: "the privatization of certain spaces has restricted people's access to places of particular beauty. In others, 'ecological' neighbourhoods have been created which are closed to outsiders in order to ensure an artificial tranquillity. Frequently, we find beautiful and carefully manicured green spaces in so-called 'safer' areas of cities, but not in the more hidden areas where the disposable of society live"[15]. Additionally, the Pope warns of the social consequences of environmental injustice, such as social decline, loss of integration and social cohesion, as well as the social isolation of the large groups of population.

In the fifth section of the *Laudato Si'* entitled "Global inequality" Pope Francis states that environmental degradation is inextricably connected with several dimensions of global injustice. The Pope clearly discards issues of population growth and its contribution to the global environmental crisis, declaring questions of contraception and birth control as non-issues. In his words, "to blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumer-

ism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues"[16]. Thus, the Pope directly references the treadmill of production and consumerism arguments, stating that the unconstrained consumption of the rich minority of the world's population endangers the entire planet. However, the Pope's arguments are not developed further since he doesn't try to explain the root causes of consumerism, nor explain the connections of consumerism with identity construction in postmodern, media-saturated and consumerist societies.

By describing "the ethics of international relations" as the causes of global environmental injustice, Pope Francis also references both world-systems and environmental justice theories. The Pope mentions unbalanced trade relations with exporting raw materials to the developed North causing environmental degradation throughout the poor South. International environmental justice is flawed since "ecological debt" is accumulated through pollution and resource depletion caused by consumption taking place in developed countries. The Pope proposes a solution for this situation: "The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development"[17].

Pope Francis implicitly refutes the ecological modernisation theory by refusing any partial, peacemeal solutions of environmental problems and the technocentrism paradigm inherent in such solutions. This is especially visible from the following passage[18]: "Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources".

When it comes to the constructionism vs. realism debate, Pope Francis seems to affirm a strong realistic view towards environmental issues. His list of the environmental problems, such as pollution, resource depletion or drinking water shortage, appears to be comprehensive and commonsensical, notwithstanding the fact that he mentions that "on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views"[19]. This position is quite understandable bearing in mind anti-relativistic epistemology that is present in the entire Catholic social teaching, as well in other teachings of the Catholic Church. In our opinion, this is the main weakness of the encyclical and the entire ecological dimension of the CST. Constructionism/constructivism doesn't nihilistically deny the real existence of environmental problems, but it only warns of the process of their social construction. Environmental problems don't arise out of nothing, and they don't exist as such. The plurality of interests of various social agents has to be borne in mind, media agenda included. Only by fully acknowledging different perspectives and interests, as well as their partial and biased nature, democratic environmental public policies can be reached and enacted.

The importance of vested interests and environmental bias can be illustrated by analysing reactions to *Laudato Si'*, which have been particularly negative in the United States (Maza, 2015). Two of the Republican aspirants to the presidential nomination, Rick Santorum and Jeb Bush (both Catholics!), criticised the encyclical as the Pope's unwelcome interference into questions of science, politics and economic politics, advising him to keep himself only to the theological and moral issues. On the other hand, these politicians, as Maza shows, will quote Catholic social teaching whenever their political attitudes can be supported by the teaching.

6. Conclusion

Even though Catholic social teaching in some respect can offer a nuanced analysis of environmental issues, its main *raison d'être* primarily continues to be the theological interpretation of the environmental crisis with the purpose of motivating the Christians/Catholics to behave in an environmentally correct way. The Pope explicitly acknowledges the motivational purpose of CST in the following passage[20]: "I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters."

However, as shown in this paper, Catholic social teaching incorporates almost all of the paradigms and theories that are present in the environmental social science disciplinary traditions. In this way, the teaching continues to present a useful partner in a dialogue between science, industry, civil society and the general public. Pope Francis evokes the much needed pluriperspectivism by stating that "if we

are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it" (Laudato Si', No. 63). In his opinion, the Catholic Church achieved a good balance between faith and reason by accepting a dialogue with philosophy, and social teaching represents an example of such a synthesis with regard to social issues.

Starting from the 1960s, almost all social encyclicals analyse environmental issues and development in an integral way by connecting them to the structure of the so-called world-system. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* continues to follow this tradition by pointing out the unjust international trade relations and unbalanced burdens of pollution and resource depletion, coupled with unequal benefits arising from capitalist development. However, such a global perspective of Catholic social teaching sometimes obscures environmental injustice present in societies with relation to class, ethnic and racial inequalities, and well-documented in social research. In line with its "preferential option for the poor", Catholic social teaching would benefit from the more intensive inclusion of an analysis of this dimension of environmental justice in its tenets. *Laudato Si'* tackles this issue more strongly than previous encyclicals, thus making a valuable contribution to teaching and to the social sciences.

Catholic social teaching would also benefit from including a more relativistic stance towards the idea of the social construction of environmental issues. Even though this idea is often contested in the social sciences themselves, the milder versions of constructivism could be very useful in discussions about the public prominence of particular environmental issues and problems, as well as in the debunking of anti-environmental ideologies that stem from the vested interests of different social and business groups.

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(Endnotes)

1 It seems that the use of the adjective "environmental" has been preferred over the adjective "ecological" in the social sciences over the past couple of decades. The main reason behind this usage are probably the more naturalistic connotations that follow from the latter term, i.e. the broader scope of the term "environment/al". However, different scientific fields have developed their own idiosyncratic usages. For example, economists differentiate between "environmental economics" and "ecological economics", wherein the latter approach is of a more interdisciplinary nature, while the former works more strictly within the neoclassical analytical framework (Venkatachalam, 2007). On the other hand, in sociology the term "environmental" is commonly used.

2 However, we must point out that the empirical validity of White's hypothesis cannot be strictly tested if it is to be understood in a proper way, as a cultural disposition that arose from the Christian spiritual and theological heritage. Understood in this way, the hypothesis can hardly be tested by establishing correlations between religiosity and environmentalism indicators.

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6 Pope John Paul II. (1991), Encyclical Centesimus Annus. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html

7 However, Benedict XVI rejects any form of pantheism and neo-paganism by saying that "human salvation cannot come from nature alone, understood in a purely naturalistic sense" (Caritas in Veritate, No. 48)

8 Pope Benedict XVI (2009), Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate. https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

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EKOLOGIJA I RAZVOJ U KATOLIČKOM SOCIJALNOM NAUKU: SLUČAJ ENCIKLIKE *LAUDATO SI'*

Sažetak

U ovome se radu pokušava kontekstualizirati ekološka dimenzija suvremenoga katoličkog socijalnog nauka. Imajući u vidu ovaj cilj, autori raspravljaju o obilježjima i korisnosti različitih teorija i pristupa (pristup političke ekonomije, teorija ekološke modernizacije, teorija ekološke pravednosti i socijalni konstruktivizam) koji dolaze iz sociologije okoliša i drugih disciplinarnih tradicija iz društvenih znanosti. Nakon analize relevantnih povijesnih dokumenata katoličkog socijalnog nauka i ekoloških pitanja koja su sadržana u njima, autori analiziraju glavne argumente prisutne u nedavnoj (2015.) enciklici Laudato Si' (Papa Franjo) i interpretiraju ih u prethodno navedenom teorijskom okviru. Zaključno se raspravlja o koristi katoličkoga socijalnog nauka u javnom dijalogu između znanosti i drugih relevantnih dionika, kao i o osnovnim snagama i slabostima katoličkoga socijalnog nauka.

Ključne riječi: katolički socijalni nauk, Laudato Si', sociologija okoliša, razvoj, okoliš, ekološka kriza