

HOW TO COMMUNICATE ECOLOGY (LAUDATO SI')?

Introduction

How to communicate ecology? This question seemed to have little validity a decade ago. For one simple reason: ecology was not an issue that made the front pages of newspapers, did not jump to the top of Internet searches, and was not so available in Church teaching. The situation changed after the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which Pope Francis rekindles concern for the entire created world and for the environment. It calls the global crisis by name and proposes dialogue and concrete action in the Church and in international politics.

The process of mature communication plays a leading role in the above issue. Professionalism in education and responsible environmental information have the potential to offset indifference on issues affecting every single person in the world. Unfortunately, there is a general indifference to these tragedies, which still occur in different parts of the world. The lack of reaction to these tragedies affecting our brothers and sisters is a sign of the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow human beings on which every civil society is founded.¹ A concrete response to widespread passivity is to communicate ecology responsibly, in line with the Church's teaching.

This new task and this new challenge requires hard work and innovative initiatives on the part of those involved in communication in the Church. At the same time, a critical approach to the digital world and information chaos is a guarantee that the power of technology will become an impetus for further human development.² In this way, bold and creative forms of communication in a transformed information age will become a powerful voice that touches on environmental issues and will lead to ecological conversion.

Ecological conversion

The expression *ecological conversion* was first used in the Church by John Paul II in 2001, during a General Audience. It is, therefore, necessary to encourage and support the "ecological conversion" which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe towards which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator's "steward", but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss³. These words have become the seed of a deep and fruitful discussion undertaken towards a universal concern for the environment.

After several years, Francis is again calling humanity to an ecological conversion as a response to the global crisis. Moreover, by increasing the special abilities that God has given to each believer, ecological conversion leads us to develop our creativity and enthusiasm in order to resolve the tragedies of the world, offering ourselves to God "as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing."⁴ On another point, it draws attention to the involvement of the entire human

¹Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 25.

²*Ibid*, no. 47, 102.

³John Paul II, General Audience, 17 January 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.html.

⁴Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 220.

community in a process of ecological conversion, the mature fruit of which will be lasting change.⁵

An interesting initiative in this field is the *Laudato Si' Action Platform* created in the Vatican at the initiative of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development. It was inspired by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on ecology. The creators of the project aim to take and promote concrete actions to protect the environment. In line with *Laudato Si'*, they stress the need for an ecological conversion and to find real and lasting solutions to the ecological crisis. The platform is a space for searching for answers and offers out-of-the-box content in multiple languages, prepared with the help of experts and partners from around the world.⁶

The Laudato Si' Movement, on the other hand, defines ecological conversion as a profound transformation of minds and hearts that will lead to a greater love for God, for others and for creation. In this process, each person can make a positive contribution to the ecological crisis.⁷ In their promotional material, the authors explain how and why to undergo ecological conversion which involves four phases: Recognising that we have done harm to creation; Repenting and turning to the Creator; Committing to change and becoming good stewards of creation; Community conversion.

Another interesting initiative on ecological conversion is the book *The Ten Green Commandments by Laudato Si'*. In it, the author, Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, presents ten commandments relating to a new approach to the environment. They are: Taking care of our common home which is at risk; Hearing the cry of the poor; Rediscovering a theological vision of the natural world; Recognising that the destruction of creation is an ecological sin; Recognising the human roots of the crisis of our common home; Developing integral ecology and learning a new way of living in our common home; Educating to ecological citizenship; Practising ecological spirituality; Cultivating ecological virtues.⁸

Professor Zdzisława Piątek defines ecological conversion as an ethical and economic breakthrough, that is, a radical change in man's approach to nature, so different from the apotheosis of the individual theses of arrogant anthropocentrism.⁹ In the same way, the Church's teaching increasingly refers to ecological conversion, taking into account recurrent selfish human behaviour. Francis, in a statement, stressed that it will only be possible if man recognises the human roots of the ecological crisis, responds with genuine repentance and is committed to promoting solidarity and respect for the environment.¹⁰

⁵Ibid, no. 219.

⁶Laudato si 'Action Platform, <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>.

⁷Jonathon Braden, What is an ecological conversion?, <https://laudatosimovement.org/news/what-is-an-ecological-conversion-en-news/>.

⁸Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si'*, CCS Editorial 2022.

⁹Zdzisława Piątek, *Ekologiczne nawrócenie. Radykalna zmiana stosunku człowieka do przyrody*, <https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/prof-zdzislawa-piatek-ekologiczne-nawrocenie/>.

¹⁰Vatican News, *The Pope to Buddhists*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/papa/news/2023-01/papa-delegazione-cambogia-monaci-buddisti-conversione-ecologica.html>.

Communicating ecology

Ecological conversion becomes a strong stimulus for responsible and professional communication in the Church in matters of ecology. The content of *Laudato Si'* lays the foundations for this and directs concrete action. The encyclical does not introduce a new doctrine on ecology, but its content certainly opens the Church to overcoming indifference and debate in the public sphere.¹¹ “We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalisation of indifference.”¹² Effective ecological communication requires continuous and sustained effort, appealing to universal values to overcome stereotypes, explaining facts clearly and concisely, and supporting solutions at the citizen level.¹³ Unfortunately, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis are often frustrated not only by the rejection of the powerful, but also by the lack of interest of others.¹⁴

In the world of the 21st century, multi-layered changes in technology and information communication are taking place at breakneck pace. Ecology communication is also part of this evolution. It involves formal and informal interactions with the public, the creation of messages that touch on the scientific and emotional sphere and the sharing of knowledge, experiences, projects and processes. Many environmental issues require the understanding and support of the public in order to change behaviours and habits. In this context, together with the importance of small daily gestures, social love drives us to think of great strategies that effectively stop environmental degradation and encourage a *culture of care* that permeates the whole of society.¹⁵

An interesting example of strategic thinking on ecology is the advanced course entitled *Integral Ecology*, organised by the Faculty of Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy at the Pontifical Antonianum University. The course includes a section on *Ecology and Communication*, taught by Professor Martín Carbajo Núñez.¹⁶ The lecturer addresses ecology and social communication in an interdisciplinary way in his publications and provides a series of postulates of a theoretical but also practical nature. In view of the growing demand for *best practices* in the sector, a stimulating example of ecological communication in practice will be presented below.

Case study – Caritas Poland – Laudato Si'¹⁷

The following chapter will present a *case study* by *Caritas Poland Laudato Si'*, which has created a professional and exemplary media campaign on environmental communication in

¹¹Maria-José Pou-Amérgo (2018) Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis: newspaper coverage of Encyclical *Laudato si'* in the United States and the United Kingdom, *Church, Communication and Culture*, 3:2, 139.

¹²Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 52.

¹³Catholic Ecology, Researchers: We can all communicate climate change more effectively, <https://catholicceology.net/blog/researchers-we-can-all-communicate-climate-change-more-effectively>.

¹⁴Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 14.

¹⁵*Ibid*, no. 231.

¹⁶Pontifical Antonianum University, <https://www.antoniano.org/carbajo/culturaleView.php?lg=it&id=577>.

¹⁷Caritas *Laudato Si'*, <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl>.

Poland. The chapter was prepared thanks to the great kindness of Dominika Chylewska, a Polish woman responsible for communication of *Caritas Laudato si'*, and the relevant materials she has prepared and provided. Much gratitude is expressed to Dominika for her cooperation and assistance.

Establishing a clear communication goal and target group

The media activities of the *Caritas Poland Laudato Si'* project began in 2020 with a focus on the search for a clear objective and the definition of a target group. The authors specified the objective as follows: *To sensitise Polish public opinion and form ecological attitudes, translating the principles of integral ecology of the encyclical Laudato Si' into a practical dimension in the life of the Church and local communities.* The project creators divided the target group into three specific areas, so that they could adapt the appropriate language and actions, which is the key to effective communication activity. The different groups are: interested young people; followers and friends of Caritas; educators of children and young people.

The group of “interested youth” is characterised by the following characteristics: they study or work, they are between 20 and 35 years old, they follow influencers, they use Instagram, they watch YouTube, the common good and traditions are important to them, they basically only use their mobile phone to communicate, money is not the most important thing for them, they try to live responsibly, they study or work, ecology is important to them in theory, but they do not always know how to put it into practice.

The group “followers and friends of Caritas” is characterised by the following characteristics: they know the Caritas environment, they are of different age groups, often they are part of a group of volunteers, the mission of the organisation is close to them but the theme of ecology is new, they are present at diocesan conferences, mailing lists and Caritas events, programs and projects already existing.

The group “educators of children and young people” is characterised by the following characteristics: they educate children and young people, they are between 30 and 49 years old, they look for interesting ways to reach young people, they are dynamic social activists, they communicate by mobile phone and computer, the teaching of the Church is an authority for them, they want to transmit good values; this group is made up of priests, teachers, group leaders, sisters and volunteers.

The promotional and media activities of the project mainly focused on a promotional campaign to change awareness of what ecology is and to bring about changes in habits. The promotional campaign was carried out on traditional media, social media and on the website. In addition, the creators have realised a series of local projects and educational workshops *Caritas Embassy Laudato si'*.

Creating a visual identity

Communication specialists prepared the visual identity of the project, based on iconographic language. This included revamping the logo's colour scheme, developing fonts and colours,

creating *key visuals*, commercials,¹⁸ multimedia and promotional materials. The whole project was prepared with the help of professionals specialised in Christian projects.¹⁹ All gadgets and promotional materials produced were created in the spirit of *Laudato Si'* (e.g. the Encyclical printed on eco-friendly paper or a pack of shampoos²⁰). An instruction manual on how to build an eco-friendly laboratory with the help of a mobile embassy has also been created.²¹

The language of communication

In Poland, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* was received in two ways: on the one hand with great enthusiasm thanks to the strong voice of Francis, on the other with a misunderstanding of the content and questions about why the Church deals fundamentally with ecology. The topic has given rise to many stereotypes and misunderstandings. Therefore, the staff and collaborators of *Caritas Poland Laudato si'* have organised a series of meetings and undertaken media activities to explain to the public the principles of integral ecology. The initiators have created concrete projects and messages that explain that ecology is not an ideology but an attitude rooted in Catholic social teaching and in Polish culture and tradition, which has been passed down to us by the older generations.²² Thanks to the activities undertaken, the language of communication has been adapted to the public and the local cultural context.

Communication plan

The main target group of “interested young people” has defined a clear direction for communication activities: a strong presence on social media (Facebook and Instagram²³). A calendar of announcements, inserts and commercials has been established, and many of the promotional activities have referred to liturgical periods or current events.²⁴ The communication plan took into account special moments during the year, for example: *Laudato Si'* Week,²⁵ the Time for Creation project,²⁶ World Earth Day, as well as regular contact with the media (press-packs for journalists with texts, graphics, audio and video), the expansion of the media database, the deepening of personal relationships with journalists, television commercials and constant communication on the Internet. One of the most effective social media campaigns was the creation of an advent calendar that included ecology-related tasks.²⁷

Caritas Poland Laudato si' prepared the media communication on ecology in a professional way. The authors started with an optimal budget and with the right professionals, then identified the target groups and made an in-depth analysis of them, established communication and marketing objectives, analysed communication channels on traditional and social media, created a visual identity, a communication plan, took care of contacts with

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHk-_oN_-TO&list=PL3JUEJqMZiWAN-WQshMYRkMabSAyMcBy

¹⁹ Dayenu, <https://dayenu.pl/>.

²⁰ Encyklika *Laudato Si'*, <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/encyklika-laudatosi/>, Szampon, <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/?s=szampon>.

²¹ <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/ambasada-mobilna/>.

²² <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/o-nas/>; <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/aktualnosci/czy-twoja-babcia-tez-byla-eko/>.

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/CaritasLaudatoSi>; <https://www.instagram.com/si.laudato/>.

²⁴ <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/aktualnosci/sposob-na-ekoswieta/>.

²⁵ Tydzień *Laudato Si'*, <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/?s=tydzień+laudato+si>.

²⁶ Czas dla stworzenia, <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/?s=czas+dla+stworzenia>.

²⁷ <https://laudatosi.caritas.pl/aktualnosci/pobierz-eko-kalendarz-adwentowy/>.

journalists, newsrooms, social media managers and influencers, prepared useful measurement tools and ensured that the language of the message was accurate.

Conclusion

In recent years, awareness of integral ecology has increased significantly in the Church and in society. However, it takes time to put the right processes in place and there is increasing civic engagement. There are still many communication barriers in the field of ecology and climate change. A distorted language of communication, an inadequate narrative tone, emotional resistance, misunderstanding of Church teaching, poor dissemination of the content of Church documents, or failure to seek expert advice create barriers to communication and result in a lack of knowledge of ecological risks.²⁸

John Paul II understood the need for a solid discussion on ecology. Benedict XVI, sometimes called the “Green Pope” for his references to ecology, also advocated the protection of the environment in a practical way (the installation of solar panels in the Paul VI Hall).²⁹ Francis, on the other hand, has become a promoter of ecological conversion and the leading role of integral ecology and its practical dimension, as exemplified by the decision to convert the papal summer residence Castel Gandolfo into an ecological centre, the so-called Borgo Laudato si’.³⁰

Creating content in Church-related media on the topic of ecology is an interesting and rather new challenge. Responsible environmental communication is often preceded by a so-called ecological conversion. In many countries of the world, interesting and intriguing examples of communication of ecology in accordance with the teaching of the Church can be observed. During the Angelus prayer on 21 May 2023, Francis again invited collaboration and added that there is a great need to combine knowledge and creativity in the field of ecology.³¹ This process is linked to the assimilation of the concept of the duty to defend the common good in society, which is closely linked to integral ecology.³²

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²⁸Don Bosco Green Alliance, Training program for children and youth on climate action, <https://www.donbosco.org/resources>; Troska o stworzenieproÅbãnaszej wiary, <https://kongreskk.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Troska-o-Stworzenie-proba-naszej-wiary.pdf>, p. 58.

²⁹Maria-José Pou-Amérigo (2018) Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis: newspaper coverage of Encyclical Laudato Si 'in the United States and the United Kingdom, *Church, Communication and Culture*, 3:2, 139.

³⁰Zenit News, Papa converts Castel Gandolfo into Borgo Laudato Si: a space for training in integral ecology, <https://en.zenit.org/2023/02/06/papa-convierte-castelgandolfo-en-borgo-laudato-si-un-espacio-para-formacion-en-ecologia-integral/>.

³¹Vatican News, Pope Francis: Let us not get used to conflict and violence, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-05/pope-francis-let-us-not-get-used-to-conflict-and-violence.html>.

³²Francis, Laudato Si’, no. 156-157.

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