

Jonathan Andreas
Doctoral Dissertation in Educational Philosophy
Edinburg Theological Seminary (Texas)
May 16, 2016

From the Ground Up: A Holistic-Pluralistic Philosophy of Education for a Groaning Creation

Precis

In 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical letter in an effort “to address every person living on this planet.”¹ The letter, *Laudato Si*, subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home,” is a jeremiad delineating the maltreatment of the earth and, by extension, the global poor. It is also an invitation “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.”² This dissertation is my contribution to that dialogue.

Despite the claims of detractors and because of the reach of economic and cultural globalization, the effects of climate change over the next several generations to civilization as we know it may very well be catastrophic. This is not merely one man’s opinion. As I intend to demonstrate, it is based on the forecast of nearly all climate scientists as well as projections by reputable voices in fields such as economics, political science, and cultural history.

Imagine if we really could go back in time and educate the public about the coming Black Plague or the Great Depression or the rise of Nazism. Would it be enough to train up a generation of virologists or economists or political scientists who see things differently? How can we affect the worldview, the Zeitgeist, of the masses? These are more than mere intellectual matters; they are matters of the heart, the direction and goal of one’s life and of society at large. These are matters for educators, religions, and the media.

In our case, because of the regularities of the natural world (including human nature), we know enough about the future of our planetary limits and the effects of those limits on culture to see that any hope of reducing future suffering (including plagues, economic depressions, and fascist governments) and increasing overall flourishing is dependent upon radical change in the present. Education in the broadest sense is central to bringing about such change, but environmental education classes and school recycling

¹ Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Papal Encyclical Letter (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vatican, May 24, 2015), ¶3. Accessed June 18, 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² Ibid.

projects are not nearly enough. Education itself, not just what we teach but also how and when and whom we teach, must be completely reconsidered in light of our changing world. For instance, the philosophical legacy of Plato's universals and the Scientific Revolution's objectivism has influenced the way Western civilization views humans as separate from and above nature.

Some, like Lynn White, Jr.,³ have accused Christianity and its Jewish roots of being culpable of originating and proliferating the same ultimately destructive dualism. To be sure, countless Christians throughout history are guilty of destroying our planet's delicate web of life, some even in the name of Christ, but I disagree with the conclusion that Christianity or Judaism are fundamentally antagonistic toward creation. In fact, I will go further and propose that (1) religion in general can be a powerful force for change, particularly when that change is deeper than mere intellectual assent to a worldview, and (2) the Christian and Jewish religions are specifically well suited to "serve and preserve"⁴ creation, but only when understood apart from the influence of Greek dualism. They are also not the only two religions expressing concern for the care and protection of the land. Indigenous religions throughout the world have a wealth of knowledge and experience of their local ecosystems—tragically, western culture has decimated most all of that knowledge. If Christians are going to educate the next generation in ways that honor both creation and Creator, then we will need to reanimate the non-Hellenic (*adamah* and *chava*)⁵ roots of our tradition and reindigenize ourselves to our local environment.

White concluded his critique of Christianity's detachment from nature with an alternative: "we should ponder the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ: Saint Francis of Assisi.... Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures."⁶ It is apropos then that Pope Francis quotes his namesake in the opening words of *Laudato Si'*: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us...."⁷ To bring shalom to a broken world, educators must be a vanguard in nurturing the next generation toward a deeply rooted love of neighbor, human and nonhuman alike, and a shared sense of sacrifice for the flourishing of all creation.

³ White, Lynn, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis. *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967): 1203–07.

⁴ Gen. 2:15.

⁵ Heb.: soil and life; from which we get the connotative picture of human origins in the names of Adam and Eve.

⁶ White, "Historical Roots," 1206.

⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, ¶1.