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# *Laudato si'*: Integral Ecology and Preferential Option for the Poor

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## Abstract:

This essay examines Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* from a Latin American perspective and its reception in this part of the world, especially in Brazil. It focuses on two aspects of *Laudato si'*: its dialogical approach, and the connection it makes between ecological issues and poverty. These two aspects allow us to understand Francis's proposal of integral ecology and how the preferential option for the poor becomes central to his perspective. In addition, this essay explains how Latin American theology and pastoral experience are present in Pope Francis's thought.

## Keywords:

Pope Francis; earth; dialogue; Option for the Poor; integral ecology

When Cardinal Jorge Maria Bergoglio was elected pope, he chose the name Francis. He did so on the advice of his friend, Cardinal Claudio Hummes from Brazil, who, once Bergoglio was elected, hugged him and said: "Don't

forget the poor.” Saint Francis of Assisi is remembered as a man who left everything behind to dedicate himself exclusively to the poor by living a humble life in harmonic relationship to nature. This choice already indicated that Bergoglio would be a pope with special concern for the poor and for nature. Pope Francis’s lifestyle, discourses, letters, and documents have clearly indicated this concern.

Yet in his first appearance as elected pope by the College of Cardinals, Bergoglio said that his fellows had chosen a person from “the end of the world” to be pope. *Fin del mundo* is a common casual expression in Latin America, in both Spanish and Portuguese, that people use referring to regions that are so far distant that nobody cares nor knows anything about them. People also use this expression to tease one another when someone comes from a little-known city. That Francis used this expression to refer to himself is significant. He came to the papacy from the periphery of the world and of the Catholic Church, a region that had been colonized by Europeans in a painful process of exploitation. This region is still being exploited by economic forces from the Northern Hemisphere. Being from Latin America, Francis came from the end of the world in the ecclesial context, yet also from the continent where the most Catholics live, where Catholicism arrived by the sword of the colonizer, a region marked by inequality and poverty. The Brazilian theologian João Décio Passos writes:

Being from the end of the world is, therefore, a basic condition for a reformer pope. It is a Church of periphery, marked by the secular suffering of colonization and by the economic exploitation created in the Northern Hemisphere, incarnated in real conditions of the Latin American peoples, courageous in her struggle for justice and audacious in her creativity. Francis came from this Church. (2016a, 78)[ [1](#)]

This same region has a rich Catholic heritage in a unique process of enculturation of faith that Rome has always had difficulty understanding. The end of the world developed liberation theology and placed the poor at the center of its social, pastoral, and theological ministry, a perspective that grew amid tensions with ecclesial authorities in Rome. Francis brought with him to the center of the Catholic Church all his pastoral and theological experience from this world.

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* serves as a pontifical platform for Francis’s leadership of the Catholic Church. This document clearly shows how the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Church from the end of the world are present in Pope Francis’s ministry and in his dream of a “Church which is poor and for the poor” (2013a, para. 198). The encyclical *Laudato si’* (*LS*) completes the mark of this pontificate with the ecological concern of caring for “our common home” in an “integral ecology” characterized by an “intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet” (Francis [ [19](#) ], paras. 3, 16). These two documents provide Francis’s perspective on living the faith in the world. They are marked by dialogue and take on the real problems of people’s lives, especially those who are poor. According to Passos, “the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* and the encyclical *LS* are identified in their method and contents by this articulation between faith and life” ([ [26](#) ], 72).

Francis uses the approach of integral ecology, connecting environmental concerns and the poor who are the first and foremost victims of current paradigm of exploitation of the earth to suggest a new paradigm of caring for our common home. This care is marked by a broad dialogical perspective that includes everybody, from scientific and secular powers to the poor and indigenous communities. As Francis has said, *LS* is an encyclical in which he “would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” ([ [19](#) ], para. 3). I engage this dialogical perspective by reading Francis’s proposal of integral ecology from a Latin American perspective, specifically showing the reception of *LS* by theologians in Brazil.

## Reception of *Laudato si’*

When I read these texts and documents I experience *déjà vu*. As a Brazilian theologian, educated in the same theological tradition that marked Bergoglio, Francis’s style, language, and many of his theses sound very familiar to me.[ [2](#)] This is not only my impression, but also that of many Brazilian theologians, Catholic and non-Catholic,

who have commented and published on Francis's work, especially on *Evangelii gaudium* and *LS*.<sup>[ 3]</sup> As is typical in Latin American responses to encyclicals, many responses to *LS* have been passionate and positive.

Consider, for example, comments by the Catholic theologians Carlos Josaphat and Leonardo Boff. Both theologians are important representatives of liberation theology, and their work in this field has led to conflicts with ecclesial authorities from Rome. Both were very critical of the way the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI led the Catholic Church. Boff's works were even examined and condemned by the Congregation of the Doctrine for Faith, whose prefect then was Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI. In contrast to their critical stance towards John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Josaphat and Boff have positively appraised *LS*. Josaphat writes, "Francis now brings [the Catholic social teaching] to the plenitude of its realization. He proposes to us an ecclesiological project, improved in its evangelical fidelity and in its openness to the good of humanity and of our common home" (2016, 25). Similarly, Boff writes:

It is the first time that the papal ministry has addressed ecological issues deeply and extensively. The pope realizes the risks that the life-system and the earth-system are facing. All must contribute to "help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us" [*LS* 163]... . Caring for the earth with tenderness and fraternity in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi and of Francis of Rome, we can continue "walking and singing," full of hope, as the encyclical concludes. (2016, 15, 23)

Protestant theologians in Brazil have also received *LS* with enthusiasm. The encyclical has led many of them to hope for the strengthening of ecumenical work in the world. In a book on *LS* that gathers the leaders of seven Protestant churches in Brazil, the editor introduces this work by saying, "This encyclical, along with theological and pastoral postures of Pope Francis, will contribute to strengthen and increase the work of progressive and ecumenical groups among Christian Churches. This was already occurring from the beginning of his pontificate, and will now have a new impulse with this letter" (Ribeiro [ 30] , 12). Even secular and scientific scholars have received *LS* positively. For instance, sociologist Marijane Vieira Lisboa said, "*Laudato si'* surprised us with the courage and relevance of its perspective, of the topics that were privileged, and of the nature of the pope's reflection. All these correspond to the advancement and innovation happening across social movements and perspectives in the field of the socio-environment" (Lisboa [ 24] , 127).

The Brazilian bishops, through their representation CNBB (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops), have encouraged the study and the development of actions based on Francis's theology in *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'*. One sees this by looking at the Fraternity Campaigns that are promoted every year by CNBB. Selected for their social character and urgency in the country, they are to be studied by all Catholic parishes in Brazil in order to generate social and pastoral actions that address the chosen topic. Fraternity Campaigns have been promoted every year since 1964. The Campaigns begin during Lent, as a Lenten exercise, and continue throughout the year (CNBB [ 14] , paras. 103–8). Topics related to ecological concerns have been the theme of five Fraternity Campaigns, dating back to before the election of Cardinal Bergoglio.<sup>[ 4]</sup> This shows that the Catholic Church in Brazil has a tradition of promoting ecological awareness, and actions in caring for ecosystems. This tradition is certainly familiar to Francis, who quotes the 1992 CNBB document *A Igreja e a Questão Ecológica*, in *LS* ([ 19] , para. 88).

The 2017 Fraternity Campaign announces as its general objective: "Care for creation, especially for the Brazilian biomes, care for God's gifts, and promote fraternal relations with the life and the culture of the peoples, illuminated by the Gospel" (CNBB [ 14] , para. 16).<sup>[ 5]</sup> This document follows the see-judge-act methodology that is strongly incarnated in the Latin American Church and is used by Francis in *LS* (see Passos [ 26] , 98–104). In the "judge" part of the method, where the Brazilian Bishops look at the reality of biomes from the eyes of Catholic faith and tradition, they refer to *LS*, stating that "the theme of the 2017 Fraternity Campaign permits us to contextualize *LS* locally to assume its reflection and proposals in each community, relating the global ecological issues to local challenges" (2017, para. 206).

Based on these examples, one can see that *LS* has been well received in Brazil by Catholic theologians, Protestant leaders, secular scholars, as well as ecclesial authorities and communities. The document, however, has not been immune from criticism. One common critique among theologians is that Francis did not address the relationship between gender inequality and the environment (Barros [ 2] , 113–14). Most of the criticism, however, has come from conservative political groups. They do not accept the proposals in *LS* because the document affects their economic interests, strongly tied to the exploitation of the environment. The National Congress of Brazil, currently controlled by right-wing parties, has refused to engage in dialogue about any topics raised by Francis. For example, despite the attempts of Catholic bishops and Christian communities organized in social movements to create a broad dialogue about the reform of the Brazilian Forest Code (CNBB [ 14] , para. 143), representatives have passed bills that neutralize this code to make it easier for landowners (*latifundiários*) to use areas environmentally protected in the Amazon rainforest and to exploit the lands of indigenous groups—lands to which the original groups were given rights by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 (CNBB [ 14] , paras. 141–48).

In general, the reception of *LS* in the Brazilian context, especially among theologians, has been positive. I will now examine three aspects of *LS* that reflect the presence of Latin American theology and ministry, and the Vatican II spirit, in Francis's work. I focus on two aspects of *LS*: its dialogical proposal that rescues Vatican II, and the preferential option for the poor that is rooted in Latin American tradition presented in its theology and in documents of CELAM (Latin American Conference of Bishops). Finally, I conclude with Francis's invitation for an integral ecology that hears the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

## Dialogue and Collegiality

One of the primary aspects of Francis's pontificate is collegiality. He created a council of cardinals to help him in decisions, which is unprecedented in Catholic history. He rescued the importance of synods that were created by Paul VI and lost force during John Paul II's and Benedict XVI's pontificates. For the synod on the family, Francis promoted lay participation, through encouraging episcopal conferences to consult the faithful and to send reports to be discussed during synodal meetings. The result of this was the apostolic exhortation *laetitia Amoris* (2016) which Francis published based on the bishops' debate, refusing to write a document on his own.

With this collegiality, Francis draws on the approach to decision making introduced by Vatican II. This approach stressed the necessity of a deep dialogue inside the Catholic Church, and between the Church and the modern world. Vatican II was built on a spirit of dialogue. This was essential for its fruits to flow to the Church and the world. One of most important impulses for this spirit of dialogue was, first, the courage and humility of John XXIII who engaged the entire Church in a dialogue to rethink herself and her mission in the world. Then, Paul VI provided a form for this dialogue with the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* where he presented dialogue as the method of the Christian apostolate rooted in four characteristics: clarity, meekness, confidence, and prudence (Paul VI [ 28] a, paras. 81–82). The documents of Vatican Council II show the Catholic Church's engagement in dialogue with other Christian traditions (*Unitatis redintegratio*), with other religions (*Dignitatis humanae*), and with the modern, secular world (*Gaudium et spes* [1965]). The last of these is the Vatican II document most present in *LS*.

*Gaudium et spes* (*GS*) in particular emphasized the importance of dialogue, as seen in two key aspects. First, its language was not merely ecclesiological; it used language that the modern world could understand. In addition, *GS* explicitly mentioned that intelligible language is a core value in the process of the dialogue to build a better world through collaborative actions (Vatican II Council [ 33] , para. 4). Second, unlike other documents before Vatican II, *GS* adopted a posture of dialogue. It highlighted the importance of Christian communities engaging in public life in collaboration with civil society. All conciliar teaching was presented as invitations to dialogue, without condemnation or impositions. For that reason, *GS* began its arguments from humanist ideas, such as human rights, human dignity, freedom, peace, and the common good. Moreover, it connected these humanist principles with the Catholic teaching affirming that there were no contradictions (Vatican II Council [ 33] , para. 40). Francis returned to this source, connecting reality, dialogue, and faith (Passos [ 26] , 67–69).

This dialogical and collegial approach was incorporated by the Latin American bishops, who had just entered into continental collegiality with the Latin American Conference of Bishops (CELAM). This conference began in 1958 in Rio de Janeiro. But it was the first conference after Vatican II, in Medellín, Colombia (1968) that marked the beginning of the Latin American tradition of collegiality and dialogue, stressing the preferential option for the poor and the work for justice. Medellín encouraged a liberating ministry based on critical dialogue because this is what “Latin America needs to redeem itself from unjust servitude and, above all, from its own egoism” (CELAM [ 10 ] , para. 4.8). The 1979 conference, which took place in Puebla, Mexico, affirmed that the Catholic community must be a “bridge of contact and dialogue” (CELAM [ 11 ] , para. 1226). It then added: “In an attitude of sincere listening and welcoming, in this contact and dialogue we must address issues that are raised from their own temporal environment” (para. 1227). The last CELAM conference, which took place in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007, also embraced dialogue as a way of announcing the good news and denouncing social sin, “a dialogue from different cultural worldviews: celebration, inter-relationship, and revival of hope” (CELAM [ 13 ] , para. 97). It is important to note that Cardinal Bergoglio, then Bishop of Buenos Aires, was present in Aparecida and was a member of the committee that wrote the final document of this CELAM conference. Francis thus knows this document very well and indeed quotes from it several times in *Evangelii gaudium* and *LS*. [ 6 ]

Pope Francis’s ministry incorporates as key elements of his pontificate the centrality of dialogue and collegiality that is emphasized in Vatican II and CELAM’s documents. He usually begins his texts and documents affirming he is offering a reflection to “enter into dialogue with all people” ([ 19 ] , para. 3). In *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis argues that social dialogue is important to construct peace and to evangelize (2013, paras. 238–58). He writes:

Evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church. (Francis [ 17 ] , para. 238)

In *LS*, Francis stresses: “Today in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life” ([ 19 ] , 189).

Latin American theologians have highlighted this dialogical perspective in *LS*. Methodist theologian Helmut Renders has noted that “It is remarkable that he [Francis] presents the Catholic Church almost only as *primus inter pares* referring to ‘Catholic Church and other Churches...’ The Catholic Church signalizes to others a desire to have collaboration among equals as a starting point” (2016, 75). Catholic theologian Francisco de Aquino Júnior has stressed that *LS* “calls all people, communities, organizations, and institutions to hear the cry/groans of the earth and of the poor, and proposes an urgent challenge of renewing dialogue about the way we are building the future of the planet” (2016, 25).

Dialogue is a key part of this document in particular, and Francis’s pontificate more broadly. He dialogues with theologians, philosophers, scientists, national and continental episcopal conferences, governments and all those who want and can contribute to care for our common home. He wants broad participation. This must include the active and important voice of the poor. Their voices are discreet in Francis’s texts. They are not as directly expressed as they are in some works of liberation theology. But Francis discreetly expresses the voices of the poor, including indigenous groups, when he shows what he learned working with them before his election as pope. This learning from the poor is present, for example, when he refers to the earth as a mother who deserves care. This perspective is rooted in Latin American indigenous groups (Francis [ 19 ] , para. 146). [ 7 ] For Francis, the poor have a lot to teach us (2013, para. 198; 2015b, para. 179). Therefore, the preferential option for the poor is stressed by Francis as an expression of the Christological faith (2013, para. 198) and as an ethical imperative (2015b, para. 158).

## Liberation Theology and the Preferential Option for the Poor

Francis's *LS* is not the first time the preferential option for the poor has appeared in a papal document. In the 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, John Paul II incorporated this option into Catholic social teaching as "a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity" (1987, para. 42). However, John Paul II made this movement toward the option for the poor from a chair in Rome, rather than from embodying this option in the theology and social ministry of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Coming from this ecclesial and social experience from the end of the world, Pope Francis incorporates the preferential option for the poor in a movement from below, bringing with himself the experience of the Latin American Church. Therefore, he places the poor at the center of ecclesial *raison d'être* and ministry (a poor Church for the poor). He sees their suffering as intimately united to the suffering of the earth. The poor are not only objects of Church charity. They are also agents of transformation who have something to teach the Church (Francis [ 17 ] , para. 198). From them, including especially indigenous peoples, the Catholic Church and the whole humanity can learn new and creative ways to care for our common home (2015b, para. 179).

Although Vatican II opened the door for raising awareness of the option for the poor, formally endorsing a preferential option for the poor was not possible during the Council. This option appeared in a concrete socio-pastoral practice in the actions of Christian communities in Latin America. Then it gained its theological foundation and ecclesial support in the work of liberation theologians and documents of CELAM, especially Medellín ([ 10 ] , para. 14.9) and Puebla (1979, para. 1134). The 2007 CELAM conference in Aparecida confirmed the preferential option for the poor as a decisive requirement of the Church's Christological faith ([ 13 ] , para. 392). In conjunction with this movement from below, Francis embodies this option in the heart of Petrine ministry, as an evangelical mandate for the entire Church. He begins by referring to John Paul II: "The Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity" (Francis, [ 17 ] , para. 198). Then he goes beyond this by quoting Aparecida (2007, para. 392): "This option is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty" (Francis [ 17 ] , para. 198).[ 8 ] Having thereby established the Christological foundation of the option for the poor, Francis continues: "I want a Church which is poor for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them" (Francis [ 17 ] , para. 198).

In *LS*, Francis expands the force of the option for the poor by connecting it to the principle of the common good, a principle that now includes care for the earth. In this connection, he presents the preferential option for the poor as an "ethical imperative" to promote participation in the common good.

The principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's good, but, as I mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good. (Francis [ 19 ] , para. 158)

Francis's conviction in the Christological foundation and ethical force of the preferential option for the poor leads him to present ecological concerns in intimate connection to the dramas and sufferings of the poor. He says, "Every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and underprivileged" (2015b, para. 93). The earth and the poor are so connected that Francis even opens his encyclical placing the earth among "the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (2015b, para. 2). The earth is also a poor one who needs to be cared for along with those vulnerable humans who are the first to suffer the consequences of an exploitative paradigm of the earth (2015b, para. 190). In the unlimited use of nature and the single-minded focus on the generation of profit, Francis recognizes that there is a structure of exploitation of the earth responsible for creating poverty. This institutionalized violence has been emphasized in

CELAM's documents since 1968 ([ 10 ] , paras. 1–2; [ 11 ] , para. 46; 2007, para. 66). Following in that tradition of analysis, Francis believes that ecological issues cannot be separated from social ones. It is therefore necessary for “comprehensive solutions which consider the integration within natural systems themselves and with social systems.” Francis adds: “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” ([ 19 ] , para. 139).

The option for the poor is at the center of Francis's account of how to address the ecological crisis. This is because it is also a socio-economic crisis that the forces of market cannot solve (Francis [ 19 ] , para. 190). A new paradigm based on care must be developed. Commenting on *LS* and the importance of the option for the poor in this new paradigm proposal by Francis, Brazilian theologian Benedito Ferraro affirms: “Before the tough reality of misery and poverty created by social injustice, an option for the poor—as indicated by Pope Francis—becomes the vital energy for the defense of the common home because the poor, especially women, peasants and indigenous, are those who suffer most with the devastation of our sister-mother earth” (2016, 72). Moreover, the option for the poor is not only attention to the poor in Francis's thought, but rather it is participation of the poor in a process of transformation from a paradigm of exploitation to a paradigm of caring. People from their local communities have much to contribute to this process because they bring the richness of their culture, history, and sense of community (Francis [ 19 ] , paras. 144, 145, 179), essential to build what Francis calls integral ecology.

In a discourse delivered in the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements in Bolivia, which had great repercussion in Latin America, Francis emphasized the need for participation and actions from grassroots movements, and encouraged the social movements to continue their work from below to care for the earth and to raise their voices for the three “L's” for all people: land, lodging, and labor. He stressed: “I said it and I repeat it: these are sacred rights. It is important, it is well worth fighting for them. May the cry of the excluded be heard in Latin America and throughout the world” (Francis [ 18 ] ). Then, concluding this discourse, Francis affirmed:

I would like to repeat: the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change. I am with you. Each of us, let repeat from the heart: no family without lodging, no rural worker without land, no laborer without rights, no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity, no child without childhood, no young person without a future, no elderly person without a venerable old age. Keep up your struggle and, please, take great care of Mother earth. ([ 18 ] )

It seems that in Francis's thought and ministry, any social transformation must include a new paradigm of caring for the earth and for the poor. This must begin from below and incorporate anyone who wants to contribute to this process. The poor, in their diversity of races, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and in their creativity, have an important role in this movement for an integral ecology, not only as recipients of justice, but as agents of transformation.

## Integral Ecology: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor

Pope Francis's encyclical is not simply a “green document.” It is rather an integral document that recognizes the cry of the earth with the cry of its most suffering children, the human poor. In *LS*, Francis affirms: “Today we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” ([ 19 ] , para. 49). This union between the suffering of the earth and the suffering of the poor is what makes his proposal an integral ecology, “one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” ([ 19 ] , para. 137).

“The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” is an expression that Leonardo Boff, in a book translated into English with that title, has used as a motto in his advocacy for the earth and the poor. In English, it may seem that Pope

Francis copied Boff. It is likely that Francis wrote the encyclical in Spanish, and when one reads the original texts, there is a difference in the words that Boff and Francis use. Francis wrote *el clamor de la tierra como el clamor de los pobres* while Boff's expression is *grito da terra, grito dos pobres*, in Portuguese. In Spanish this is translated as *grito de la tierra, grito de los pobres* (Boff [ 3 ] ; see also Boff [ 4 ] ). However, the influence of Boff in Francis's encyclical is clear. It is also known in Brazil that Francis, through his advisers, contacted Boff and asked him for some of his materials (see Boff [ 9 ] ).

Boff has studied and written about ecological issues connected to social injustice and the suffering of the poor since the 1980s. He affirms a holistic perspective for addressing ecological issues from the view of liberation theology. This perspective includes the reality of oppression of the poor and the importance of listening to their voices (Boff [ 5 ] , 104–5). Boff stresses that the poor are the first and the most affected by the unlimited exploitation of nature that follows from a mechanistic paradigm of infinite progress. Drawing on a famous distinction made in Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, Boff says that the modern capitalist world is led by a *spirit of geometry* rather than the preferable *spirit of finesse* (1997, 71–72). The spirit of geometry sees the earth as a source to be explored by human force and reason. With the advent of industrialization, the free market, and the victory of capitalism, the spirit of geometry became a machine of destruction, exploitation, and injustice. This has made the earth a private property of those who operate this machine. As a result, the earth is crying in a passion of suffering, and the source of life is dying. Together with the earth are the poor who are also crying as victims of this machine who are excluded from their accessing the goods of the earth.

“The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” is a motto for a different approach to the earth and its resources. It is a cry for ecological and social justice. Boff argues for the spirit of finesse over the spirit of geometry. The spirit of finesse rises from contemplating the harmonic beauty of creation. It is a spirit of tenderness, caring, humility, and community. It is a wisdom that comes from the heart. According to Boff, a new paradigm of progress must be based on the spirit of finesse, a tender and humble spirit that recognizes the wonder of the earth as our common mother who provides every resource we need to flourish and, at the same time, acknowledges her limits as a fragile mother who deserves our care. The indigenous peoples of Latin America express this relation with the earth in a maternal way by praising *Pachamama*, the great Mother Earth (Boff [ 7 ] , 75–76).

Francis defends an integral ecology that invites us to assume values of a “great sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land.” And he adds, “These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples” ([ 19 ] , para. 179). These peoples, humble and poor, the first victims of environmental devastation, have essential values to teach the whole humanity, especially those who build their power and status in a spirit of geometry of unlimited exploration of the earth and inhumane exploitation of the poor. The spirit of geometry has the market forces as its main instrument of exploration and exploitation. This instrument is killing our great Mother Earth and her little children, the poor. Francis clearly affirms: “The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” ([ 19 ] , para. 190). Both Boff and Francis call for a new paradigm of holistic and integral care for the earth and her children. Francis adds to this call the invitation for an ecological and communitarian conversion. “This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness” ([ 19 ] , para. 220). A *spirit of finesse* and *generous care* that is *full of tenderness* is a spirit that recognizes the beauty of creation in which all humans are living in the same common house, the earth. This spirit seems to be far away from market forces that are grounded on a fundamentalist paradigm of unlimited exploration and exploitation of the earth which creates agony of the poor.

In *Laudato si'*, the pope from the end of the world who chose the name of Francis shows the intimate relationship between ecological concerns and the socio-economic issues responsible for exploitation and poverty. His appeal is for an integral ecology that promotes care for the earth and her inhabitants, especially those who are the first victims of the environment-socio-economic crisis.

## Notes

- 1 All translations from the Spanish and Portuguese are mine.
- 2 On the main aspects of Bergoglio's formation, see: Passos , 76–80.
- 3 On *Evangelii gaudium*, see Murad and Tavares ; Passos .
- 4 Ecology was a topic of Fraternity Campaigns in 1986, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2016 and 2017. The process of choosing a theme and preparing a campaign is marked by collegiality among the bishops with broad participation of Catholic communities and social movements. Moreover, many of these campaigns involved ecumenical participation of other Christian traditions, such as the 2016 Campaign, which had the theme “Fraternity and Life in the Planet” (CNBB , para. 20–21).
- 5 This document also states more concrete objectives, such as better understanding the biomes, committing the Church to the rights of the native peoples from these biomes, and advocating in the public arena for policies for the preservation of the biomes and the rights of the peoples.
- 6 In *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis refers to the document of Aparecida in paras. 10, 15, 24, 83, 122, 124, 181, 198; and in LS, he refers to it in paras. 38 and 54. The Argentinian theologian Juan Carlos Scannone () examines the presence of the theology of CELAM's documents (from Medellín to Aparecida) and the theology of people (an Argentinian branch of liberation theology) in Pope Francis's texts. Francis also quotes a text by Scannone at para. 149 of LS.
- 7 See also de la Cadena; Humphreys .
- 8 Aparecida 2007, para. 392 also says: “Our faith proclaims: ‘Jesus is the human face of God and the divine face of man.’ Because of that, a preferential option for the poor is implicit in our Christological faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty. This option arises from our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who became our brother; option, however, that is not exclusive neither exclusionary.” The highlighted sentences are words of Benedict XVI from the Opening Address of the Conference of Aparecida, delivered on 13 March 2007. It was the first time that a CELAM document states the option for the poor as a Christological option, although Christological foundations for the option for the poor were present in the documents from the CELAM meetings in Medellín and Puebla. Moreover, liberation theologians have affirmed this since the 1970s. See, for example, Leonardo Boff's book *Jesus Christ Liberator* published in 1972 (see Boff , 12–13).

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