"Care for the common home":

Responses to Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter

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Abstract

This article aims to build awareness of the growing global crisis in social, economic and

environmental terms from different disciplinary approaches. The authors respond to the

message of Pope Francis presented in his Encyclical Letter published in 2015. The article

provides a short current overview of the discourse and presents three hypotheses anchored in

the disciplines of Psychology, Health and Theology for a deeper discussion of Pope Francis's

viewpoints on the challenges to humankind and how to address them. It thereby contributes to

the discourse on health and religion with regard to the Pope's message to the world

community. The article leads to an interdisciplinary conclusion and directions for future

research and practice.

Keywords: global crisis, health, thanatology, human ecology, salutogenesis, encyclica

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Introduction

The 21st century has brought new anthropogenic challenges to the global community (Harper & Snowden, 2017). Researchers have opted to approach these challenges by integrating interdisciplinary and international educational developments to increase awareness of social, economic and environmental issues (Brudermann et al., 2017). An entire discourse has started to discuss how leaders need to develop a deep and complex understanding of the systemic changes and the interplay of society, technology and environment during the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Porter & Heppelmann, 2015; Stubbings, 2018). Among many commentators, Pope Francis, as the highest representative of the Catholic Church, has added his voice to the discussion on the growing crisis in human value orientations, environmental destruction and health (Lin, 2018) from his religious and spiritual point of view.

In the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, published in 2015, Pope Francis presents an analysis of the current global situation by describing its background, and providing particular definitions, examples and conclusions regarding humankind's situation. His desire is to establish nothing less than a "new human spirit" for a new world and a global "care for the common home" of humankind (Pope Francis, 2015). Thereby, he synthesises theological and scientific views, conducts a new discourse including ecological and health perspectives, and calls for original visions and strategies for an integrated move forward (Lin, 2018). As an international leader combining theological, political, and policy-making issues with ecological sciences (Lyon et al., 2018) and mental health (Mayer, 2017), he expands on previously published Encyclicals. Scientists from various disciplines have taken the discourses further (George, 2017; Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, 2017; Maibach et al., 2015), as have members of non-governmental organisations (Club of Rome, 2017), and political commentators (Carroll, 2017).

Catholic Encyclicas are irregularly published manuscripts written and presented by the current pope. These manuscripts are not only written for the members of the Catholic church, but for "all human beings of good will" (Pope Francis, 2015).

The second Encyclica published by Pope Francis is an extraordinary manuscript, since it presents an integrative diagnosis of the world's condition, with critical recommendations for the world's community. Ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical respondents have joined the academic and intellectual discourses; however, hardly any of the responses have taken salutogenesis – from the health sciences point of view, thanatology – from the psychological standpoint - and human ecology – from a theological perspective – into account. Anchored in the three disciplines, the topics highlighted are researched by using theoretical approaches from these disciplines to analyse Pope Francis' thoughts.

The aim of this article is to review the contribution of the Encyclica from three disciplinary perspectives: health sciences, psychology and theology, using three main hypotheses, as stated below in Thesis 1-3. Thereby, the contribution of this article is to take the original discourse further from three disciplinary perspectives, providing three established hypotheses on the challenges to humankind and their potential solutions. These are followed by conclusions and recommendations for future theory and practice.

The Encyclical Letter's Claims and Responses

According to Hoffmann (2016), Pope Francis finds purpose in reflecting on the interaction of human beings with planet Earth, by improving the human role of providing environmental stewardship as a personal calling while criticising the economic market as excessive and improper (Althammer, 2014). Mazo (2015) refers to the Encyclical Letter as a major contribution to public discourse and policy, particularly with its interwoven economic, ecological and health-related approach. Posener (2018) caricatures the balancing act of the Vatican during the recent years between market criticism and a 'yes' to the social market

economy. Further, Cavanagh (2016) highlights the Pope's idea of building on a "care for a common home", while focusing on sympathising with the disadvantaged and with future generations based on a radical market critique. In the edited book *Laudato Si*, George (2017) presents a diversity of perspectives on the encyclical ideas from different theoretical and methodological stances in which scientists respond to the Encyclica and comment according to specific disciplinary views. Based on these discourses, the following selected propositions are presented and discussed.

Thesis 1: Sustainable health is the core in building and maintaining a common home

The maintenance and reconstruction of health is of high relevance in the holistic ecology of Pope Francis (2015) and the aim is to understand what health is and how it can be developed and/or maintained (Mayer, 2017). The Encyclica has been analysed using the theoretical approach of salutogenesis, the study of the development of health (Antonovsky 1979).

To maintain holistic health and well-being on global, regional, national and local levels, a systemic perspective of how to address and develop health across cultural contexts is needed (Mayer, 2011). Holistic health and well-being is, according to Myers and Sweeney (1992), a balanced concept, which is created through a life orientation which Antonovsky (1979) calls "sense of coherence" (SOC). This life orientation has the three components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Anotonovsky, 1979; Mayer et al., 2016).

- Comprehensibility is defined as the ability of an individual or group to understand the
 world. Comprehensibility is created through consistency, repeated experiences and a
 stable and secure environment which provides the individual with the ability to learn
 through consistent experiences.
- Manageability is described as the ability to cope with daily life challenges and to be

able to activate the resources needed to confidently cope with life's tasks and challenges.

Meaningfulness is usually described as the most important component, since it is the
motivational component which provides the individual or group with meaning in life.
 This component gives meaningfulness to leading a good and healthy life and supports
the individual not to experience life as a burden.

A strong SOC has been associated with a dynamic health concept which defines health as being between the two poles of optimal health and disease. A strong SOC supports psychological and physical health and well-being within an individual (Mayer & Krause, 2012). Cilliers (2001) points out that within a systemic (group) context, the individual SOC impacts on the group SOC and is established through it. A high SOC has been associated with strong intercultural competence, a successful life, a healthy lifestyle, effective interpersonal relationships and the ability to fulfil political, social and economic functions (Mayer, 2011). Based on the perspective of Antonovsky (1979), Mayer (2017) concludes that holistic health for the individual needs to be constructed in terms of identity-based values, for the community and society in terms of collective values, and for universal humanity by referring to global humanistic values. These health-related values need to be connected systemically in harmony with nature and a higher power, such as God or the belief in oneself, to become implemented in a sustainable, systemic and health-orientated way which includes the different levels of human interaction.

By referring to the levels of health and values described above, Pope Francis (2015) declares that the health and well-being of humankind needs to be reflected within human consciousness. It is important that health and well-being are connected to an internalised intra-personal consciousness and inner peace, in order to become sustainable. This intra-

personalised and balanced consciousness needs to build on comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of the individual, at the core of intra-psychological and interpsychological health and well-being.

Sustainable health is established within the individual consciousness and needs to take salutogenic and ecologic concepts into account to create meaningfulness and flourish on local, national, regional and global levels. Intra-psychological health can become anchored on the belief in a higher power, through which comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness can be increased and strengthened. To establish this intra-psychological salutogenic state, an ecological and spiritual, not material, value base is needed which envisions a healthy and sustainable common for future-orientated house humankind. Comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, as SOC's main components, need to be established. This can happen on an individual basis through parental upbringing and educational systems which focus on ecologic and holistic well-being and through an environment which promotes stability and comprehensible information, access to social, spiritual and material, as well as intra-personal resources, and a constant development of meaningfulness on individual, collective and global levels. In the Encyclical Letter, health is therefore anchored on an ecologic and spiritual value basis which forms part of a holistic ecology. Pope Francis (2015) emphasises that the components of SOC in future can be improved, strengthened and supported by focusing on the individual's ability to activate their own resources. However, the key to holistic global health and well-being is fuelled by the meaningfulness experienced by the individual, of contributing to building a better world which opposes technocratic behaviour and mass consumption across cultures, religions and societies.

Thesis 2: The Homo Anthropocenicus (HA) will not be able to free himself from his dilemmas

Since the published essay "The Anthropocene" by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000) in the Global Change Newsletter, the term "Anthropocene" has become part of a scientific heuristic, and public discourse. So it is in "Laudato Si": scientists respond to the Encyclical by Pope Francis, in which the term is used by several authors. In 2016, the acceptance of the notion of a "man-made age" took place during the 35th Congress of the International Society of Geology. The irreversible trace-relinquishing action of man is located in time at the latest at the beginning of the atomic age and since World war II.

In terms of human and humanlike *tipping functions* - even unnoticed - there are systematically erroneous, false and irrational assessments including fatal patterns of behavior. According to Ulrich Beck (2016), humanity is in a self-induced metamorphosis through its organized irresponsibility with at best uncertain outcome.

The assumptions made are valid, one must pay attention to the name-giving protagonist and driver of our age, the Anthropocene. For this purpose, Homo Anthropocaenicus (HA) can be prototypical designed. HA is characterized by the following - mostly unconscious - stable and procedural characteristics:

- 1. Freedom of fear: HA lives in a Freedom of fear, which is far-reaching for the flourishing, social, international and ecological Coexistence. For HA there is no God, there is no final judgment and no universal justice is waiting. The state (law, justice, enforcement) is far away. The relevant own interests are represented by organisations that are "free of fear" and act "creative". HA is also not afraid of hunger or loss of personal integrity, since he no longer gained both biographical experiences.
- 2. Childishness: He must always pacify his own needs. He has learned to play the various "games of adults" (Fromm 1979, Berne 1964). For example, an almost childlike consumption (Having) and ethics (which is good for me is good).
- 3. Acceleration / Rapidacion: He lives in a high-speed of perception and decision. This concerns his understanding of the Environment (e.g. Information, mobility,

- consumption) and self-Concept (efficiency, social contacts and expectations).
- 4. Demarcation: He actively uses technological possibilities as a consequence of which biological, psychological, social and social cycles and structures are dissolved.
- 5. Helplessness and power Orientation: He resembles the sorcerer's apprentice.

 Permanently intoxicated, compared to a System perceived as UN-alternative. If he wants to influence this, then for his own benefit.
- 6. Narcissism: Homo Anthropocaenisus does it because he can.

Overcoming of man's fear would have become an evolutionary trap of a special kind, mainly due to civilizational achievements. For man's instinctive fear of the consequences of his own actions and failures - both in his own and in the "common house" - must be interpreted as one of the most important resources in the Existence of evolutionary requirements. Only the existence of civilizational powers and the obligations and rights arising from them engender the problematic resources of the nature of man (Lorenz, 1973; Mohr, 2014).

Particularly problematic is the fact that the fitness criteria outlined in the HA appear to be constitutive features of economic, political and social elites. This, too, speaks of the Encyclical and is perfectly compatible with parts of the scientific discourse.

As if such a finding were not already complex enough, there is another, subtle and at the same time weighty mark of the HA. A situation in which the interactive-systematic path of multiplicative development of toxic qualities can be justified by personality deficits: It is the last almost complete loss of knowledge about the consequence of one's own death and the dissolution of personal existence. The consequences of this denial, and here in particular collateral damage to each individual person, social, or even "co-world-interaction", find their expression in the described carelessness of the HA (Kastenbaum, 1972).

In the Encyclica, directions are ultimately clear: there is no future of man without Christian faith or a comprehensive ethics of responsibility. If the countries of the transition, China, India, South America and the Nations of Africa, choose and progress the path taken in the West for themselves, there is only little use of its unforeseeable "therapy and healing". The geophysical, biological, civilizational, economic, social and salutogenetic trends described in the Encyclica and elsewhere are of the nature that the "concern for the common home" and need to be taken into consideration when aiming at a salutgenic and health-orientated way forward into a sustainable future.

Thesis 3: Revolutionary Human Ecology – a theological perspective

Finally, the encyclical letter offers, from a theological point of view, a new theme and a new ethical justification with regard to human ecology. Above all, the new ecological focus has a revolutionary character (Wet, 2017): While other social encyclical letters discuss social and economic issues, the ecological question in ,Laudato si' is not only addressed as a field of application of a previously defined ethical classification. It is rather viewed as a Christian-ethical legitimacy and thus profiled as a value compass of first priority. The holistic idea of human ecology – as a salutogenic resource - normatively considers the human being in his relationship with God, his/her neighbours and the environment (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 27). In the Order of Creation, God has given this threefold responsibility to man, whose observance leads to salvation and whose disregard, however, leads to the calamity of the individual man and humanity as a whole. In contrast to this responsibility, in Western reality, the value of humankind is largely limited to the usefulness which is measured economically. Mankind is taking God's place (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 66) defining, based on economic logic, dignity, respect and shame. Thus, the inviolability of the human dignity, which is derived from being the image of God (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 84), is perverted. Such a reduced idea of the

individual is contrary to the holistic human ecology and does hardly contribute to a salutogenic life style:

- 1. It destroys the relationship of Man to God and thereby impacts of the creating of meaningfulness of individuals. The value of man depends on economic usefulness. This dehumanisation is understood by the pope as a breeding ground for exploitation (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 5). This excluding Homo-Economicus-ethics leads globally to a disposable mentality, marked by fear on the one hand and greed on the other (Pope Francis, 2015, pp. 59, 105, 203).
- 2. Such a culture contradicts the holistic human ecology as coexistence of humans living together as a human family, in a "common home". Humans are reduced to machines and functionalised in the transmission of the economy which again reduces their manageability and meaningfulness in a salutogenic manner. The aim to reduce acts of global social injustice (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 48) is hampered by international debt interdependences (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 52), which impacts strongly on the human self-destructiveness without increasing a salutogenic life-style.
- 3. The relationship with the environment is destroyed through irresponsible behaviour of human beings towards nature. This is the third violation of the imperative of holistic human ecology: Global warming (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 167), the lack of clean water (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 185), air pollution, increasing migration flows (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 25), global and local social tensions and wars (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 14, 142) are considered consequences of this irresponsibility of the elites in the world which suffer from a lack of creating responsible meaningfulness in the salutogenic mindset. Pope Francis is programmatically advancing as a voice for equality driven social justice and a Christian social doctrine which includes the entire world community (Heimbach-Steins & Stockmann, 2015).

God's oblivion, the social coldness of the people among themselves and irresponsibility towards creation are understood as a threefold breach of the Treaty of Man towards God. The aim of human ecology is to replace the power of the market with a primacy of politics (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 196). Human-ecological public welfare orientation should replace selfish self-benefit thinking in laws and virtues (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 42). Such a desired system change leads - so Pope Francis - to a new normative concept of progress, which is capable of reining technology and market power with a politically consistent revitalization of the Christian principle of the general determination of goods for all (Pope Francis, 2015, pp. 42, 67). This synthesis has nothing to do with a third-party economic path of "sustainable growth" at first, as this is considered a lazy compromise, which at most nicely cloaks the evil of market logic (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 194). The pope requires a radical change of system to a new economy under a politically organized ecological primacy (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 42). The dialectics of technological-economic paradigm and exclusion are to be overcome by a holistic synthesis of human ecology, which for each human being provides competence spaces to cultivate his responsibilities on his salvation way before God. It needs an ideal of a new virtuous person who fills this responsibility in the sense of the Salvation Plan and thus revolutionizes the order of human ecologically. Virtue education is highlighted to abolish consumerism and selfishness (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 192), small or large ecological gestures of every person, political primacy before market power, community ideal instead of individualism (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 203, 208) and public welfare orientation are the political Consequences of a new ecological world order.

This requires a comprehensive education programme, especially for the exploiters and the consumer polarized egoists to a new lifestyle. Then, like the visionary idea, they also change the global conditions and order. To this end, the pope develops an impressive programme of Franciscan-ecological spirituality, which is unique in such a combination for the Social Teaching of the Church. It includes a charisms-oriented culture of gratitude, gratuitousness,

simplicity, fraternity with the environment, moderation, humility, amazement, serenity (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 224), mindfulness (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 231), harmony, justice, fraternity (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 82) and tenderness (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 91).

Not only with the subject, but also with the turn to practice, the encyclical letter offers new and original insights. Discussions on the justification of values and social principles are missing. In their place, a radical application-orientation with concrete proposals for a good action and thinking of man now occurs. Their derivation is made without reference to thomistic natural law, especially with recourse to the Franciscan theology and mysticism (e.g. Bonaventura). For an analysis of the economy, there are also modern paradigms of the church's long-condemned liberation theology (Boff, 2016), which cannot be understood as a continuation of the theology of Benedict XVI. In view of the human ecological catastrophes, biblical or mystical theological sources serve as evidence-based justifications. The starting point is the more spiritually than rationally developed love logic of the Divine Salvation Plan (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 77), which permeates the three human responsibility relationships. Questions that people are harassing today are illustrated by means of concrete images, so that the message can reach many people who are more likely to close a systematic-theological approach. The loving language, especially towards the poor, makes the text particularly appealing to these disadvantaged.

From a theological point of view, the holistic human ecology is a new, universally valid normative perspective which refers to the core of salutogenesis in terms of creating comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this article was to review the contribution of the Encyclica from three disciplinary perspectives: health sciences, psychology and theology, using three main hypotheses and interdisciplinary discourses to advance the encyclical perspectives interdisciplinary. This

article thereby presents three approaches which emphasise the need for humankind to change and develop innovative and constructive ideas and behaviours which are anchored in sustainable thought patterns, behaviour and positive emotions and which are based on a salutogenic, health-related mindset.

From a salutogenic perspective, humans need to develop a salutogenic mindset and a self-reflective practice anchored with a core concept of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in terms of SOC which relates to the greater good of humankind and the ideal of constructing a healthy and meaningful world which can be understood and managed by a majority of human beings. It is further argued that humanity needs to aim at developing and promoting comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness on global and local levels, across cultures and disciplines and within the context of a human ecology. This will contribute to recreating a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle and thereby foster "care for the common home" of humankind. To create self-awareness, dignity, respect for self and others, educational and organisational settings are needed which ensure space for interdisciplinary discourses on salutogenesis and mental health and well-being, the transformation of humankind regarding the concept of Homo Anthropocenicus and a revolutionary human ecology which is in its core comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

From a psychological perspective, humanity is in a self-induced metamorphosis through its organised irresponsibility and can be described as the Anthropocene who is mostly unconsciously displaying discussed stable and procedural characteristics. The Anthropocene needs a redefinition and recreation in a salutogenic way to secure his/her survival and sustainability in the world.

Finally, it can be concluded that a salutogenic mindset, which is displayed in the Encyclica, can contribute to transforming negative human conditions and characteristics towards a more sustainable world and support the revolutionary ecological transformation towards an improved treatment of the world and its resources, but reference to comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness and the aim to establish a "common home for humankind".

Additionally, the idea of the "selfishness of human beings" and its possible transformation towards a more social and just being needs to be evaluated and re-constructed.

Furthermore, the universal claim for unconditional responsibility and dignity of humankind needs to be guided, managed and filled with a meaningful understanding of what it means to be human. Ethical and religious discourses can challenge value orientations and their redefinition and re-evaluation within the context of building a salutogenic and healthy world and "home" for all humans, as described by Franco (2016).

Based on the conclusions, future recommendations can be provided on practical and theoretical levels:

Future research needs to focus on and re-evaluate religious value discourses, such as displayed in the Encyclica, and voices coming from different religious backgrounds, contributing valuable insights for a recreation of value discourses and offering new guidance for humankind to (re-)establish a healthy, human and just world which aims for an overall dignity of humankind. This will be particularly valuable for the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in which values, society, technology and the environment need to be taken care of in a complex and systemic manner.

Future research further should use interdisciplinary approaches to interweave the different disciplinary perspectives and present holistic conclusions on how to secure an overall understanding, manageability and meaningfulness of the world as a common home.

On a practical and applied level, educational and ecclesiastical institutions, as well as other organizations need to practically "listen" to the different voices from various religious backgrounds and their contributions towards an increasingly healthy, human and ecological world which strives for sustainability and humanness. Institutions and organizations need to start creating a world which is salutogenic in its nature by creating an increased comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness for a world and home which is growing in complexity and challenges. These organizations could offer trainings, educational inputs, group session to increase interdisciplinary exchange of ideas which can then lead to further actions and meaningful interactions. On a practical level this can contribute to a care for a common home across cultures, religions and disciplines which does not only remain of a theoretical level, but which is anchored in in-depths discourses and applied across different societal levels.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

The research does not involve human participants or animals.

It is a document analysis – therefore no informed consent is needed.

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