

On Pope Francis' Laudato si' and the ideas of Murray Bookchin

Presentation by Ian Bekker (Potchefstroom)

Abstract:

Pope Francis' recent "green" encyclical *Laudato si'* has already caused division within the Catholic world; conservatives have expressed alarm at the supposed radical nature of his message, while progressives, particularly in the global south, have been encouraged.

Following on themes already present in his earlier Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, this Argentinian Pope places much of the blame for the current ecological crisis squarely at the foot of systemic factors; targeting in particular the negative effects of the current financial and economic system.

While it is important to not underplay the moral and spiritual factors which Francis also alludes to, it is clear that, on this basis, there is an interesting overlap between the message of *Laudato si'* and the Social Ecology project of Murray Bookchin. This becomes all the more apparent when we take into account the emphasis in Catholic social-teaching on subsidiarity; a principle which embraces decentralization and the local and on which Francis draws explicitly in his encyclical.

This paper elaborates on these intriguing overlaps (while not obscuring important differences), while also pointing to Francis' close allegiance to similar positions expressed by the current patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Bartholomew I. It is hoped that such developments within the two largest streams of Christianity will provide impetus and support for other more secular progressive movements, including that centered around Bookchin's ideas.