

A Igreja entra no clima: comunicação, educação e consumo em “Sobre o cuidado da casa comum” – encíclica papal de Francisco

The Church enters the climate: communication, education and consumption in “On care for our common home” – pope Francis’ encyclical letter

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Resumo: *A conformação tridimensional do campo comunicação/educação/consumo objetiva dar conta dos complexos processos e relações que envolvem a construção do cidadão enquanto ator social ativo na produção das suas próprias identidade e cultura e responsável pelo seu destino histórico. Em seu bojo, tais dimensões adquirem estatuto de um direito inerente aos sujeitos na construção material e simbólica de uma existência problematizadora e libertadora. O artigo visa, a partir da aplicação dos princípios teórico-metodológicos da Análise do Discurso ao texto da encíclica papal *Laudato si'*, de Francisco, evidenciar a propriedade, pertinência e eficácia desse campo no entendimento do sujeito contemporâneo imerso em seus desafios cotidianos de autoconstrução identitária como cidadão livre, lúcido, atuante e transformador da realidade do mundo.*

Palavras-chave: *consumo sustentável; comunicação; educação; sustentabilidade*

Abstract: *The three-dimensional conformation of the communication/education/consumption field aims to account for the complex processes and relationships that involve the construction of the citizen as an active social actor in the production of their own identity and culture and responsible for their historical*

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destiny. In their midst, such dimensions acquire the status of an inherent right of the subjects in the material and symbolic construction of a problematizing and liberating existence. From the application of the theoretical and methodological principles of Discourse Analysis to the text of the encyclical papal of Francisco, Laudato si', the article aims at evidencing the propriety, pertinence and efficacy of this field in the understanding of the contemporary subject immersed in his daily challenges of self-construction identity as a free, lucid, active and transformer citizen.

Keywords: *sustainable consumption; communication; education; sustainability*

In today's society, consumption, beyond the simple belonging of objects and satisfaction of needs, constitute the phenomenon of communication and symbolic exchanges, within which common meanings and values are built, defined, transformed and reconfirmed. It must be thought as an activity of "joint production, with other customers, of a universe of values" (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2004, p. 115). In this context, in which the act of consuming does not constitute as an isolated process, but a social one, merchandise, reified, conduct subjectivity and the construction of identities.

Thus, consumption "is affirmed as a fundamental referent for the conformation of narratives, of image representations and imaginary universes filled with meaning" (ROCHA, 2008, p. 122). Consuming is, thus, a narrative act, an identity, profoundly rooted in culture. Thus, changes in standards need to be forged in the ambiance of constructive movements of new identities, co-related to new lifestyles, that may emerge along with a new paradigm of the contemporary being.

In the complex relationship between society and nature, strongly tensioned and problematized in the unescapable crisis of climatic change (GIDDENS, 2010; KLEIN, 2014) and other ecological phenomena of global magnitude and impact, consumption, understood also as a political act, requires an important dislocation of more frequent axis of their study. Thus, beyond the identity narrative of "self", in a narcissist and alienated society, consumption signals a possible place of recuperation of public space and a life politically and socially active (CANCLINI, 1996). It represents, thus, a privileged perspective for the discussion of issues related to social processes of contemporary life production and sustainability (LEFF, 2016).

Looking for wider answers more consistent to this set of restlessness, socially more inclusive visions and postures are being shaped in terms of access and distribution of wealth, and also better focused in the aspect of use and consumption of natural resources. These new articulations go through the contemplation of the sustainable production and the consumption, while the responsibilities become meaningful if and when

are shared socially; far beyond the sphere of individual behavior. We establish, thus, through the focus of consumption, the space for a new political practice, putting in scene issues related to citizenship and political revalorization of the public space (CANCLINI, 1996).

In this perspective and in the context of world environmental crisis, the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, “*Laudato si’*” – about the care of the common house” the second letter since the beginning of his term, announced in June 18th, 2015, acquired notable repercussion both in the scientific, intellectual and media fields, and the civil society organized around ecologic and environmentalist themes. Internationally distributed, in eight languages, by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana², the papal letter was promptly nicknamed in Brazilian media as the “green encyclical letter” and received with praise for being considered the most striking document among all of those which the Catholic Church approached crucial issues for the defense and promotion of the environment and nature.

For the purpose of this study, it is interesting to us, overall, the treatment given in the encyclical letter to the inter-relations between communication, education and consumption in the promotion of a new global social economic scenario, guided by what the Pope called “integral ecology”, which would be consolidated by the collective adoption of new sustainable practices of production and consumption. The papal text used here maintains the original spelling in Portuguese, according to the edition published by the Vatican, and the transcribed quotations bring, between parenthesis, the respective numbers of paragraphs where they were extracted.

We proposed to discuss the encyclical of Pope Francis under the emancipating perspective of the emerging field of communication/education/consumption, in a quest to evidence its pertinence and efficacy in the understanding of the complex processes of construction of conscient subjects, critical, active and reflexive in the contemporary society. We

2 The name of the encyclical letter was inspired in Saint Francis’ canticle “Praise be to you my Lord”, which in the “Canticle of creatures” remembers that Earth, the common home “can be compared to a sister, with whom we share existence, and a mother, who opens her arms to embrace us”.

highlight that what is advocated for this so-called emancipating perspective of the communication/education/consumption field translates into the education of the subject both for consumption and the construction of their possibilities of critical and reflexive critic over media content, over mass media and its function in contemporary society. In other words, its configured in the search of a reflexive and critical education for consumption, understood as an inalienable right of the subject (BACCEGA, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012), since it recognizes the power of their practices in the production of identity, inclusion and citizenship.

Communication/education/consumption: a field under construction

In today's hyper-mediatized society, the traditional agencies of socialization - family, church, school - and, therefore, of formal, informal and non-formal education of individuals, are pervaded by media, that come, more than to share, to add a relevant role in the conformation of new subjects. Media educate and must be recognized as places producing knowledge (CHARLES-CREEL; OROZCO GÓMEZ, 1990; BACCEGA, 2005). It is in this space of intersection between traditional instances and media that the field of communication/education is configured (CHARLES-CREEL; OROZCO GÓMEZ, 1990; BACCEGA, 2008, 2010, 2012), having as objects the new forms of production of knowledge, of social meanings and cultural imaginary. It is about opportunities coming from the dialogue articulated between both agencies - communication and education - in search of a more inclusive and equitable construction of conscious, critical and reflexive citizens.

In this context, the incorporation of consumption as a fundamental part of the field in construction points towards the recognition of their practices and sociocultural dimensions - both symbolic and material - while structuring elements of identity, subjectivity and daily existence of the contemporary subject.

According to Maria Aparecida Baccega (2010, p. 51), the "incorporation of knowledge over paper and the function of consumption in the

constitution and organization of contemporary society is filled with fundamental importance for the formation of capable and critical citizens. And, she adds, it is this knowledge that will allow the verification of the way the events act in the culture where the subject is formed and with which he interacts. In other words, the education allows the reduction of fragmentation of reality, developing the capability of perception of connections between phenomena.

In the encyclical papal analyzed, the discursive operationalization of this perspective is revealed, among others, in the paragraph 110, where the pope criticizes the alienation of the contemporary subject, which is conditioned by the “fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant”.

“Laudato si’ - On care for our common home” and the paradigms of sustainable consumption

The encyclical of Pope Francis, “Laudato si - on care for our common home” is an extensive document, composed by 192 pages, organized into six chapters: i) What is happening to our common home; ii) The gospel of creation; iii) The human roots of the ecological crisis; iv) Integral ecology; v) Lines of approach and action and vi) Ecological education and spirituality.

Without getting deep into the scientific or technological dimensions of the issues approached, the catholic document embodies dense concerns on climate change, with the planetary problem of water, pollution, genetically modified organisms and the preservation of biodiversity, among other relevant themes under the point of view of contemporary environmentalism. In this context, they direct sharp criticism towards society in its “weak responses” (§54) facing the themes approached and what he called a “false or superficial ecology” (§59) which “bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (§59) in the social recognition of the real dimensions of the problems enrolled. On the other hand,

it advocates for the coping of which the considers fundamental, therefore, the implementation of lifestyle changes and the incorporation of sustainable standards of production and consumption (§13).

As a response to the criticism he incites, the encyclical advocates for the adoption of what he calls an “integral ecology” (§11), that adds to the human, and the place he occupy in the universe, all the relationship with the place that surrounds him, including the institutions and social, political and economic spheres that integrate the everyday life, not allowing that the human being keep seeing nature as something different than themselves. Thus, he calls on authorities from around the world for the adoption of new transparent and sustainable standards of development, production and consumption, product of real, open and honest social dialogues. He decidedly criticizes the “efficientist and immediatist” technocratic approaches that believe it is possible that the market defends or promotes adequately the environment in its critical contemporary issues. Similarly, it condemns technology in its pretended capability of always finding, in each situation given, efficient solutions for serious environmental problems that they provoke.

According to Maria do Rosário Gregolin (2007, p. 13) “the discourse is taken as a social practice, historically determined, which constitutes subjects and objects”. Reinforcing this understanding, the pope’s document is structured based in the recognition, by the Church, of the fact that the challenges and the threats of all current societies, even with different degrees of intensity, are today exposed related directly or indirectly with hegemonic consumption patterns in a global scale, which, in turn, structure and are structured homologically by the current systems of production.

According to the pope, that situation comes from what he calls “technocratic paradigm”, which conforms the meanings and lives of today’s societies. Such paradigm, given by products and conquests of technique, impose, in a global scale, lifestyles and mass, alienating systems of production and consumption that are sustained by the illusion of freedom of choice and self-determination of the subject; those values maintained in circulation and constantly renewed by the interested action of mass

media. In other words, subjects and objects are built vivified and put into interaction by their own logics and discursive practices originated from the paradigms of technique. In this sense, these discourses “operate a game which they constitute identities based in the rule of knowledge over the use people must do of their bodies, their souls, their lives” (GREGOLIN, 2007, p. 18).

We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build. (§107) [...] The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic. It has become countercultural to choose a lifestyle whose goals are even partly independent of technology, of its costs and its power to globalize and make us all the same. Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic, and those who are surrounded with technology “know full well that it moves forward in the final analysis neither for profit nor for the well-being of the human race”, that “in the most radical sense of the term power is its motive – a lordship over all”. [GUARDINI, 1965, p. 63-64] As a result, “man seizes hold of the naked elements of both nature and human nature”. [GUARDINI, 1965, p. 63-63] Our capacity to make decisions, a more genuine freedom and the space for each one’s alternative creativity are diminished. (§108).

Designed so discursively the scene, pope’s encyclical - where it interest us - becomes the proposition of a strategy of communication/education focused on the critical deconstruction of the interested use of media in the production of elusive meanings for life, which maintain and recreate “anxious, dissatisfied” (§203) subjects, “melancholic, with a harmful sense of isolation” (§47) and “with a tedious monotony” (§113).

Through this investment, the Pope believes in his discourse the subject can free himself from the technocratic game, unraveling the astuteness put forward in and through mass media and by the new media, and

then create, self-educating oneself, a new possibility of social insertion. In this context and through the free conscious adoption of new lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption, the subject can rebuild his citizen dimension, experiencing new and regenerating meanings for their everyday existence.

Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending. Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals. Romano Guardini had already foreseen this: “The gadgets and technics forced upon him by the patterns of machine production and of abstract planning mass man accepts quite simply; they are the forms of life itself. To either a greater or lesser degree mass man is convinced that his conformity is both reasonable and just”. [GUARDINI, 1965, p. 63-64] his paradigm leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume. But those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power. Amid this confusion, postmodern humanity has not yet achieved a new self-awareness capable of offering guidance and direction, and this lack of identity is a source of anxiety. We have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends. (§203).

We know that, throughout the process of transformation of the capitalism from its “rough” shapes, characteristics of modernity, to the “liquid” shapes of contemporaneity (BAUMAN, 2008), consumption of goods, services, values and meanings acquired material and symbolic materiality never socially experienced before (CAMPBELL, 2002; FEATHERSTONE, 1995; GIDDENS, 2002; HARVEY, 2007; SLATER, 2002). Within this long and complex process, alterations, cracks, ruptures and emergency of the new models of production and consumption were, at the same time, cause and effect of a new lifestyle, permanently in construction, unstable, mutant and unrested. In this path, individual and collective identities were shattered, doomed to the infinite process of permanent reconstruction, which where consumption will mean, if not the only one, at least the main promise of salvation, pleasure and reward, even if eternally dissatisfied (BAUMAN, 2008; HARVEY, 2007, LIPOVETSKI, 2009).

Maintained thus dissatisfied and willing, subjects need to be fed and filled with new products and their endless substitutes, in a whirlwind of production and programmed obsolescence of new merchandise, whether they are products, services, values or meanings. Thus, the generation of excess and elimination of residue became essential necessities of the new lifestyle of the world. And, without a doubt, they became the main articulators of the forms of unstoppable and insane forms of exploitation over the available natural resources, which the world has been watching throughout the last decades, and that nowadays show signs of evident exhaustion.

Pope Francis discourse adheres to this understanding and, through that, is equipped with elements to elaborate harsh criticism to consumerism “where a constant flood of new products coexists with a tedious monotony” (§113), and the culture of disposables, in “this same “use and throw away” logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary” (§123). However, in its understanding, the pope doesn’t deny the relevance of the role of consumption in the identity conformation of the subject, since “In our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and neighborhoods, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity.” (§147).

His lines reproduce, to a certain extent, the contemporary context where the word sustainability was incorporated into our daily lives and began to be employed with such prodigality, that the majority of the discourses - including the media discourse that we intent to analyze - seem to renounce the necessity to specified the term employed, denying the character of inconclusion and sociopolitical fluctuation of its meaning³.

However, even if we cannot think about the existence of a consensus on the definition about what sustainability is in the contemporary human societies, it is possible to conclude that in every version proposed to discuss this issue, the issue of revision and redefinition of socially

3 In a particular manner, it is highlighted that there is no precision of meaning for the concept that is socially being constructed for the expression. “sustainable consumption” or its variables: “responsible consumption”, “smart consumption”, “proactive consumption” “conscious consumption”, “ethical consumption, among others.

dominant consumption patterns emerge in the center of the discussion⁴. The same way, the concept of “sustainable development”⁵ doesn’t find a consensual base for its best accuracy. Anthony Giddens in “The politics of climate change”, published in Brazil in 2010, questions the contradictory meanings between the terms “development” - linked to dynamism and change - and “sustainable”, related to continuity and balance. He says: “One of the responses to the evasive nature of this concept was to simply avoid defining it, and, instead, replace it with an agglomerate of goals” (GIDDENS, 2010, p. 88).

New schedules for consumption: from private to shared

Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. [...] The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion. (§219).

The individualist organization of consumption in contemporary life, resulting in a consumerism morally criticized by authors like Hannah Arendt (1997), Richard Senett (2006) and Zygmunt Bauman (2008), produce as a result the alienation of subjects of collective problems and interests⁶. On the other hand, we can’t disconsider that the consumption practices can also be rearticulated in the production of new possibilities of political action and reconstitution of subject-citizen. In this sense, Pope Francis says:

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our

- 4 About the purpose of the process of consensual construction - in process - of the concept of sustainable consumption, see study of Rosseti e Giacomini Filho (2010) about the social consensus in Habermas and its interaction and pertinence in the study of communication and sustainable consumption.
- 5 The expression was socially introduced through the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, presided by Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and became known around the world as the Brundtland Commission (Cf. GIDDENS, 2010).
- 6 About the issues and visions of morality and ethics of consumption in contemporary societies, their conflicts and contradictions, see PERES-NETO, 2015.

mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (§202).

Here we find a discursive alignment from Pope's encyclical letter to what Lucien Sfez (1996) interpreted in contemporary society as the utopic vision of "Big Health". According to Sfez, it is about the last post-modern ideology and the utopia par excellence of 21st century, which consolidates what he called an integrating "eco-bio-religion", in all its symbolic magnitude, of the project of regeneration and purification of the integral health of the human species and the planet.

According to this direction towards the desirable and urgent changes in the construction of new lifestyles and models of consumption are possible, it is important to call on, also in the pope's understanding, the agencies of the field of communication and education, because "change is impossible without motivation and a process of education" (§15) and, in this path, ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere" (§213).

The pope evaluates that one cannot underestimate the importance of a wide environmental education, which includes the mobilization of all the instances to this end - formal, informal, non-formal - and the forms how it can reconfigure daily habits of consumption.

To attain such end, it is up to the media to perform a social role of collective agencing of subjectivities, when putting in circulation and articulating utterances that "regulate" discursively the forms of being and acting of subjects⁷, "Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market." (§ 215).

7 It is important to remember that, according to Gregolin (2007, p. 23-24) "it would be restrictive to understand there is only passivity towards the collective agencing of subjectivity; on the contrary, there are points of fugue, of resistance, of singularization [...] As a consequence of these movements, identities are no longer rigid or concluded".

Going through this path, pope's text evolves for the consideration that, in the current environmental context, changes in lifestyle became essential. In this process, he considers that the aware and active citizen can, through their choices "A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power" (§206), inducing changes also in companies behavior, "forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production" (§206).

What is transparent is the understanding that sustainability cannot be disconnected from the search of understanding and the systematic questioning of consumption and its meaning in today's society, mixing and weaving consumption patterns both from individuals and business themselves, whether they are national companies, big corporations or multinational conglomerates, governments and organisms of the organized civil society, etc. (SANTOS, 2006).

About the media, including all contemporary digital media, pope's encyclical is clear to recognize its irrefutable role in deepening thinking and the construction of critical thinking and citizen's ethics (§47). He doesn't spare criticism, however, when pointing their notorious omission in this sense, specifically in the case of the internet that,

[...] which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature. Today's media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences. For this reason, we should be concerned that, alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise (§47).

We, therefore, see that in the discursive construction of the inter-relations communication/education/consumption for the production of the new social subject - or even we'd say the new conscient consumer - any

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communication isn't enough, not the abundant, excessive, selective and "omnipresent" (§47) offered by the digital environments. A problematizing, complexifying communication of the understanding of relationships of difference among beings, between classes. A communication that points toward the revelation of the Other, and only then, is capable of integrating necessary knowledge for the promotion of freedom and regeneration of the Human species and the Planet. Communication and education merge into a new emancipating perspective, since that, more than informing, they aim to conform new free forms, critical, balanced and reflected of the relationship of the subject with himself, with alterity and with the world.

Environmental education has broadened its goals. Whereas in the beginning it was mainly centered on scientific information, consciousness-raising and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of the "myths" of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market). It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God. Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care (§210).

Contemporaneity brought a set of complications, anxieties and risks to human life, among which environmental and food issues began to represent their most dramatic axes (BAUMAN, 2008; LIPOVETSKY, 2007). It is important to outline that those dangers began to be experienced with a bigger load of drama in the individual and private sphere. Such conditions, according to the analyzed encyclical, can and must be overcome, since it has no way out than the rupture of the sphere of isolation towards active, conscient and political occupation of the community and the public sphere.

Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment; These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society (§208).

Final considerations

Through the perspectives outlined in this article, based on the encyclical by Pope Francis, it is legitimate to consider the emergency of a new invigorating space of social practice, capable of rescuing the individual for the exercise of their role as citizens, politically participant and active, supplanting the pessimism of his condition of a mere individual consumer, isolated, apathetic and demobilized. In this context, the analysis proposed revealed that, for such transposition to become effective, we need to mobilize apparatus, devices and media of communication agencies and education agencies that may comprise the construction of a new and regenerated subject. And, in this context, so that the subject may be acting in the construction of the new social reality, becomes indispensable that it has, still, conditions that relate critical and reflexively with the sphere of consumption.

Therefore, the discursive analysis of a wide, meaningful, current and consistent corpus, as Pope Francis' encyclical, points towards consistent answers aligned to the goal of this article, which was recognizing and reinforcing the triad component of the field communication/education/consumption as operationally satisfactory, productive, pertinent and efficient for the understanding of the contemporary subject immersed in their daily challenges of identity self-construction as a free, lucid, active citizen changing the reality of the world.

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