

## LAUDATO SI'

### Pope Francis' encyclical on caring for our common home:

#### Discussion guide

#### Introduction

*In his second encyclical Pope Francis takes stock of the degradation of the earth, aligns it with the cry of the poor and lays the blame for such devastation at the feet of human intervention. Laudato Si' – "May you be praised" – comes from St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures.*

Pope Francis refers to his namesake in reminding us "that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us". This sister is crying out to us, he says "because of the harm we have inflicted on her".

There are several main themes:

- The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
- The conviction that everything in the world is connected
- The critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology
- The call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress
- The intrinsic value of each creature
- The human meaning of ecology
- The need for forthright and honest debate
- The responsibility of international and local policies
- The throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle (16).

In referring to the encyclicals of his recent predecessors starting with Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Pope Francis locates *Laudato Si'* firmly in a body of Catholic social teaching regarding the earth as a social justice concern. The

papal statements echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers and theologians and civic society as well as other religions. Pope Francis appeals for "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet... since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all". On practically every page, Francis draws links between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

The full text is at

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

#### What is happening to our home

In this first chapter, Pope Francis presents the most recent scientific findings on the environment as a way to listen to the cry of creation. Climate change is a global problem representing one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day (25). The greatest impact of this change falls on the poor who have little defence against its concomitant health hazards.

The present level of consumption in developed countries where the habit of wasting and discarding has reached "unprecedented levels" cannot be sustained. "The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty" (27).

"Access to safe, drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights". To deprive the poor of access to water means to deny "the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity" (30).

The earth's resources are also being plundered because of shortsighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. Different species containing genes which could be key resources for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems are being lost largely through human activity. Those "richly biodiverse lungs of our planet" – the Amazon and the Congo basins – are important

for the entire earth and for the future of humanity. Within a few years of such forests being burned down for cultivation, countless species are lost and the areas “frequently become arid wasteland”.

Oceans contain the bulk of our planet’s water supply and most of the immense variety of living creatures but this marine life is threatened by uncontrolled fishing so that certain species are depleted (40). Coral reefs can be compared to the great forests on land for the million species they harbour. Many of the world’s coral reefs are already barren... due largely to pollution from deforestation, agricultural monocultures, industrial waste and destructive fishing methods. Pope Francis calls for greater investment in research to understand more fully the functioning of ecosystems. “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect...” (42).

**Human beings too are creatures of this world ... so we cannot fail to consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture** (43).

Referring to the “unruly growth” of many cities which has generated pollution from toxic emissions as well as urban chaos, poor transportation and visual pollution and noise, Pope Francis says we were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal and deprived of physical contact with nature (44).

Some places of particular beauty have been restricted through privatization. “Frequently, we find beautiful and carefully manicured green spaces in so-called “safer” areas of cities, but not in the more hidden areas where the disposable of society live” (#45).

The result of such global changes can be the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people and the loss of identity (46).

The influence of media and the digital world can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. Thus the great sages of the past risk going unheard amid the noise and distractions of information overload ... “a sort of mental pollution” (47).

Today’s media do enable us to share our knowledge and affections, Pope Francis says, but, in a reference

to the Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes the Church in the modern world*, he says they also “shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences” (47).

Looking at a decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, Pope Francis shows how a true “ecological debt” (51) exists with the North in debt to the South. In the face of climate change, there are “differentiated responsibilities” (52) and those of the developed countries are greater.

“These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years” (53).

In the face of the drama of many peoples and populations, Pope Francis is clearly deeply affected by the “weak responses” (53). He refers to a “complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (59) despite the lack of positive examples. There is a lack of an adequate culture and a willingness to change lifestyle, production and consumption (59). However, clear efforts are being made “to establish a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems” (53).

#### For reflection

- In what ways has your life and your family been negatively affected by “rapidification”?
- Why is the impact of climate change disproportionately felt by the poor?
- Why does Pope Francis say that water cannot be treated like other natural resources that can be bought by those who can afford it?
- How does our “throwaway culture” contribute to feelings of hopelessness in the face of our environmental problems? How can we combat this in our lives?
- How can you significantly limit your consumption of nonrenewable energy? What can you do to help poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development?

## 2. The Gospel of creation

In this chapter, Pope Francis outlines the contribution of religious beliefs and faith traditions to an integral ecology and human development. Acknowledging the role of science and philosophy, the encyclical also seeks to show how faith convictions can offer a foundation of care for the environment and care for the poor and most vulnerable sectors of society. As Christians we are reminded of our responsibility for creation and are called to reaffirm our commitment to care for the environment.

To face the problems illustrated in the previous chapter, Pope Francis selects biblical accounts, offering a comprehensive view that comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this he articulates the “tremendous responsibility” (90) of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (95).

In the Bible, “the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected” (73). The story of creation is central for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures and how sin breaks the equilibrium of all creation in its entirety: “These accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (66). For this, even if “we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (67). Human beings have the responsibility to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15) (67), knowing that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God” (83).

***Creating a world in need of development, God in some way sought to limit himself in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator. God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature, and this gives rise to the***

***rightful autonomy of earthly affairs. His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, “continues the work of creation”. The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge: “Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if a shipbuilder were able to give timbers the wherewithal to move themselves to take the form of a ship” (80).***

That the human being is not the master of the universe “does not mean to put all living beings on the same level and to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. Nor does it imply a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility” (90). In this perspective, “every act of cruelty towards any creature is “contrary to human dignity” (92). However, “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (91). What is needed is the awareness of a universal communion: “called into being by the one Father. All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (89).

Pope Francis refers to the philosophy of Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who developed the idea of humans having equal importance with other creatures including the earth.

***The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things (83).***

The compassion for which Pope Francis has become known informs his writing of the pain of the earth. He refers to his first encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) with “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (89).

His concern for the poor throughout nature and the world is expressed in his doubt in the authenticity of a communion with nature “if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.

It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human

being deemed unwanted. (91).

Pope Francis speaks of the earth as a shared inheritance whose fruits ... benefit everyone. "Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and in a reference to John Paul II's encyclical *Laborum Exercens* 1981 "the first principle of the whole ethical and social order" (93).

Pope Saint John Paul II continues, "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone... a type of development which did not respect and promote human rights – personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of nations and of peoples – would not be really worthy of humanity". Referring to a "social mortgage" on all private property, John Paul says this is so that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them... it is not in accord with God's plan that this gift be used in such a way that its benefits favor only a few." This calls into serious question the unjust habits of a part of humanity, says Pope Francis (93).

The Pope continues the discussion of ownership and its rights with a reference to the Gospel of Matthew "he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Mt 5:45). The practical consequences of this are outlined in the writings of the bishops of Paraguay: "Every campesino has a natural right to possess a reasonable allotment of land where he can establish his home, work for subsistence of his family and a secure life. This right must be guaranteed so that its exercise is not illusory but real. That means that apart from the ownership of property, rural people must have access to means of technical education, credit, insurance, and markets" (94).

Jesus was constantly in contact with nature, "lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder". His parables are full of references to the world around the disciples, whether it be the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the mustard seed which becomes "the greatest of plants" (97).

In "full harmony with creation" Jesus amazed those around him. "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Mt 8:27). Most of his life was dedicated to working with the matter of the earth, the simple life which drew no admiration. "Is

not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mk 6:3). Says Francis, "in this way he sanctified human labor and endowed it with a special significance for our development" (98).

The Christian understanding of the world is bound up with the mystery of Christ present from the start.

***One person of the trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy (99).***

The chapter concludes with the heart of Christian revelation: "The earthly Jesus" with "his tangible and loving relationship with the world" is "risen and glorious, and is present throughout creation by his universal Lordship" (100).

#### For reflection

- In the biblical account of creation, what are the "three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships" that ground human life?
- Why is the traditional understanding of humanity's "dominion" over the earth an incorrect interpretation?
- What does the "priority of being over that of being useful" mean to you?
- Pope Francis writes, "Everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others". What evidence do you see of this in your own life and family?
- "The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge." How does this give you hope for the future of both humanity and the earth?

### 3. The human roots of the ecological crisis

Pope Francis tries to ascertain the deepest causes of the ecological crisis, which include the technology, globalization, and modern anthropocentrism. He believes that technology gives those who possess knowledge on such technologies and have the economic resources to use them an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. As Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research points out, the connected technological advances have led to unprecedented disparities and to wasteful over-use of resources. Pope Francis calls for a deeper look at labor and new biological technologies along with a broad, responsible, scientific, and social debate.

This chapter gives an analysis of the current situation, “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (15), in a dialogue with philosophy and the human sciences. Reflections on technology are an initial focus of the chapter: the great contribution to the improvement of living conditions is acknowledged with gratitude.

***Technology has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings. How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications? How could we not acknowledge the work of many scientists and engineers who have provided alternatives to make development sustainable? (102).***

However, it gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (104). Referring to the use of nuclear bombs or the technology used by totalitarian regimes to kill millions of people, Pope Francis says, “Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used” (104).

Humans have always intervened in nature but this has mostly been in tune with and respecting the possibilities. “It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed” (106). Now, Pope Francis writes, the relationship has changed, become exploitative and confrontational so that it is easy to accept the idea of unlimited growth. “It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit” (106).

It is precisely the mentality of technocratic

domination that leads to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people and the most vulnerable populations. “The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economics and political life” (109), keeping us from recognizing that “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109).

Pope Francis is concerned that technological specialization obscures the bigger picture and disregards the relationships between entities.

***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. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests (110).***

“Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism” (116): human beings no longer recognize their right place with respect to the world and take on a self-centered position, focused exclusively on themselves and on their own power. This results in a “use and throw away” logic that justifies every type of waste, environmental or human, that treats both the other and nature as simple objects and leads to myriad forms of domination. It is this mentality that leads to exploiting children, abandoning the elderly, forcing others into slavery and over-evaluating the capacity of the market to regulate itself, practising human trafficking, selling pelts of animals in danger of extinction and of “blood diamonds”. It is the same mentality as many mafias, of those involved in trafficking organs and drug trafficking and of throwing away unborn babies because they do not correspond to what the parents want (123).

In this light, the encyclical addresses two crucial problems of today’s world. Above all work: “any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour” (124), because “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society” (128).

***Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work. Yet the orientation of the***

*economy has favored a kind of technological progress in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines. This is yet another way in which we can end up working against ourselves.*

Quoting his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis writes the loss of jobs also has a negative impact on the economy “through the progressive erosion of social capital: the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence” (*Caritas in Veritate* 666).

The second problem regards the limitations of scientific progress, with clear reference to GMOs (132-136). This is a “complex environmental issue” (135). Even though “in some regions their use has brought about economic growth which has helped to resolve problems, there remain a number of significant difficulties which should not be underestimated” (134), starting from the “productive land being concentrated in the hands of a few owners” (134).

Pope Francis thinks particularly of small producers and rural workers, of biodiversity, and the network of ecosystems.

The most vulnerable of the small rural producers pushed off their land often end up moving to poverty-stricken parts of nearby cities.

*The expansion of these crops has the effect of destroying the complex network of ecosystems, diminishing the diversity of production and affecting regional economies, now and in the future.*

Therefore “a broad, responsible scientific and social debate needs to take place, one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name”.

*This is a complex environmental issue; it calls for a comprehensive approach which would require, at the very least, greater efforts to finance various lines of independent, interdisciplinary research capable of shedding new light on the problem (135).*

Francis is concerned that an ethical position on the environment extends to human life. He says when some ecological movements defend the integrity of the environment in the interests of limiting scientific research, “they sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life” (136).

*We forget that the inalienable worth of a human*

*being transcends his or her degree of development. In the same way, when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit.*

#### For reflection

- How can we both appreciate and respect the progress that technology has afforded us and still be cautious of the evils that can accompany such technology?
- Pope Francis writes that, at times, life can become “a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence”. Have you experienced this among your family and friends?
- Reflect on this statement: “We cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.” What does this mean to you? How can you begin to heal your “fundamental human relationships”?
- How is concern for the environment incompatible with abortion?
- How does “The rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” lie at the heart of our environmental issues?

#### 4. Integral ecology

This chapter highlights the fact that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves, or just simply a mere setting in which we live. Pope Francis believes that we are not facing two separate crises, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. As Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace President Cardinal Peter Turkson believes, Pope Francis puts the concept of integral ecology at the centre of the encyclical as a paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of the person with God, with him/herself, with other human beings, with creation.

Pope Francis proposes integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice; an ecology “which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (15). In fact, “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live” (139). This is true as we are involved in various fields: in the economy and politics, in different cultures particularly in those most threatened, and even in every moment of our daily lives.

***Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality (139).***

The integral perspective also brings the ecology of institutions into play: “if everything is related, the health of a society’s institutions affects the environment and the quality of human life. “Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (142).

With many concrete examples, Pope Francis confirms his thinking that “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, and of how individuals relate to themselves” (141).

A study of the economy needs to go beyond the standardization that comes with simplifying procedures and reducing costs. We need an “economic ecology” that goes beyond mere numbers into a broader vision of reality.

Given that everything is relational, “the health of society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life” (142).

The relationship between the basic social group, the family, and wider local, national and international communities is governed by social ecology.

Institutions developing between each stratum to regulate human relationships. Anything such as injustice, violence and loss of freedom which weakens these institutions has negative consequences.

***A number of countries have a relatively low level of institutional effectiveness, which results in greater problems for their people while benefiting those who profit from this situation. Whether in the administration of the state, the various levels of civil society, or relationships between individuals themselves, lack of respect for the law is becoming more common (142).***

The social structures which have shaped cultural identity are vulnerable to environmental exploitation and degradation. The disappearance of a culture can be more serious than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. Pope Francis makes a plea for special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions.

In various parts of the world, indigenous cultures are being pressured to abandon their land in favour of agricultural or mining projects “which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture” (146).

***For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best (146).***

Pope Francis homes in on lack of housing as a “grave problem” not just for the poor in many parts of the world.

“Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families” (152). Attempts to solve housing difficulties must involve those who are going to live in the newly created areas in the process. Quoting his first encyclical which he wrote with Pope Benedict XVI, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes, “How beautiful those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development!” (152)

Learning to accept and appreciate our bodies is key to welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home. This is an essential element of genuine human ecology. “Thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy

absolute power over creation” (155).

“Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good” (156), but is to be understood in a concrete way.

*The common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good (157).*

In today’s context, in which, “injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable” (158), committing oneself to the common good means to make choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (158). This is also the best way to leave a sustainable world for future generations, not just by proclaiming, but by committing to care for the poor of today, as already emphasized by Benedict XVI: “In addition to a fairer sense of inter-generational solidarity there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intra-generational solidarity” (162).

Integral ecology also involves everyday life. The encyclical gives specific attention to the urban environment. The human being has a great capacity for adaptation and “an admirable creativity and generosity is shown by persons and groups who respond to environmental limitations by alleviating the adverse effects of their surroundings and learning to live productively amid disorder and uncertainty” (148). Nevertheless, authentic development presupposes an integral improvement in the quality of human life: public space, housing, transport, etc. (150-154).

Thinking of the kind of world we want to leave for future generations, we realize that the world is a gift which we must share with others. This means we can no longer think of reality in a utilitarian way “in which efficiency and productivity are geared to our individual benefit” (159). Seeing the world as being on loan to each generation is a key concept of integral ecology.

The risk of rampant individualism and today’s self-centred culture of instant gratification are behind “the crisis of family and social ties and the difficulties of recognizing the other... our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who

remain excluded from development” (162). Here Pope Francis calls for a “renewed sense of intragenerational solidarity” (162).

#### For reflection

- Pope Francis says: “It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation.” What are some examples of the “interconnectedness” of the universe that you have experienced in your own life? How does seeing everything as connected change the way you see the world?
- “Lack of respect for the law is becoming more common,” we read. Do you agree?
- Pope Francis says, “Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense.” What link do you see between protecting cultural treasures and ecology? Are there examples you can think of from current news?
- In what ways must technological solutions to environmental issues need to respect the “rights of peoples and cultures”? Why is the loss of human culture as serious as the extinction of plants and animals?
- Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology,” Pope Francis says. Have you considered that how you take care of your body has repercussions on the world at large? How can you become a better taker of your own body?



## 5. Lines of approach and action

Pope Francis spotlights in chapter 5 the need for a change of direction and other courses of action and outlines the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction that currently engulfs us. Pope Francis advocates dialogue on the environment in the international community, dialogue for new national and local policies, the politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment, and the religions in dialogue with science. According to Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of Postdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, *Laudato si'* does not provide technical guidance; however, the pope does highlight the ethical dimension of the climate problem and he provides fundamental principles to be applied for solutions: the preferential option for the poor, inter- and intragenerational justice, common but differentiated responsibility, orientation to the common good. *Laudato si'* argues for a global governance structure for the whole spectrum of the planetary commons.

Analyses are not enough: we need proposals “for dialogue and action which would involve each of us individually no less than international policy”. They will “help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (163). For Pope Francis real approaches must be developed with dialogue, not in an ideological, superficial or reductionist way.

Despite the significant advances made by the ecological movement to put environmental issues on public agendas, recent world summits “have not lived up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment” (166).

***The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro ... proclaimed that ‘human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development’. Echoing the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, it enshrined international cooperation to care for the ecosystem of the entire earth, the obligation of those who cause pollution to assume its costs, and the duty to assess the environmental impact of given projects and works. ... [but] its accords have been poorly implemented due to the lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of noncompliance” (169).***

Pope Francis says the document the Conference of the United Nations on Sustainable Development, “Rio+20” issued was “wide-ranging but ineffectual”. International negotiations, he says, cannot make

progress “due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility” (169).

Pope Francis is concerned that some measures proposed for reducing carbon emissions will place a further burden on developing countries which are the least able to pay. “A further injustice is perpetrated under the guise of protecting the environment. Here also, the poor end up paying the price” (170).

The encyclical is scathing about the apparent “quick and easy solution” of trading in carbon credits [which] in no way allows “for a radical change which present circumstances require. Rather, it may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors” (171).

“There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. [...] the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. “But I want to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (188).

What is needed, as the popes have repeated several times, starting with *Pacem in Terris*, are forms and instruments for global governance (175): “an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of the so-called ‘global commons’” (174), seeing that “environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” (190, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church).

Pope Francis insists on the development of honest and transparent decision-making processes, in order to “discern” which policies and business initiatives can bring about “genuine integral development” (185). In particular, a proper environmental impact study of new “business ventures and projects demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project in exchange for favours usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and do not allow for full debate” (182).

The most significant appeal is addressed to those

who hold political office, so that they avoid “a mentality of “efficiency” and “immediacy” (181) that is so prevalent today: “but if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility” (181).

Francis encourages the integration of consideration for the environment into every project – policy, plan or program. “It should be part of the process from the beginning” ... in an “interdisciplinary, transparent [way which is] free of all economic or political pressure”.

***It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people’s physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety... The local population should always have a special place at the [discussion] table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest (183).***

Pope Francis is keen to emphasize that the Church does not “presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics”. But he encourages open and honest debate so as not to allow particular interests or ideologies to “prejudice the common good” (188).

In the interests of the common good, politics and the economy must be independent of what he calls an “efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy”. Avoiding reviewing the entire economic system simply reaffirms the absolute power of that system “a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery” (189).

Pope Francis writes of the 2007-2008 financial crisis as providing an opportunity for fruitful reform based on ethical principles but which was not taken up. The response to the crisis did not “include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world.

***The problem of the real economy is not confronted with vigor, yet it is the real economy which makes diversification and improvement in production possible, helps companies to function well, and enables small and medium businesses to develop and create employment (189).***

The need to contain growth by setting reasonable limits “and even retracing our steps before it is too late” is emphasized alongside a comment on the unsustainability of constant consumption and destruction “while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity” (193).

The deterioration of the environment can lead to the degradation of people’s quality of life. “A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress” (194).

The principle of subsidiarity grants freedom to develop the capabilities present at every level of society while at the same time demanding an increased responsibility from those in power.

“The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society” (196).

Quoting his first encyclical which he wrote with Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis says, “the gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that ‘realities are greater than ideas’” (EG 231/LS 201)

#### For reflection

- What would have to change to bring about Pope Francis’ “One world with a common plan?”
- What are some of the common plans that Pope Francis encourages the world to embrace: What can you do to help this become a reality?
- Although Pope Francis says the richer nations carry a great deal of accountability for environmental issues, why are rich and poor nations alike responsible for caring for the environment?
- Pope Francis reminds us, “Environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits”. What is your reaction to this statement? How does it challenge both the politics of the right and of the left?

## 6. Ecological education and spirituality

Pope Francis provides some more practical and pastoral guidance to caring for the environment and people. Indeed, institutions and systems must change, but at the most basic level, human beings—our lifestyle, our attitudes and values—must also change. Change must happen in terms of our lifestyles and particularly in our consumption. We as consumers have the power to influence political, social and economic systems, simply by our attitude to consumption. A new education is needed to understand humanity's covenant with the environment. Although there have been efforts at environmental education, this has been mostly about informing, rather than instilling new habits, attitudes and values. A more practical environmental education is needed that will encourage responsibility and action.

The final chapter invites everyone to the heart of ecological conversion. "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). The roots of the cultural crisis are deep, and it is not easy to reshape habits and behaviour. The instability and uncertainty of the current global situation engender a tendency for people to become self-centred and enclosed and their greed intensifies. It becomes almost impossible to accept limits.

*In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears ... social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs. So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest (204).*

The starting point is "to aim for a new lifestyle" (203-208), which also opens the possibility of "bringing healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power" (206).

This is what happens when consumer choices are able to "change the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production" (206).

Francis says, human beings are capable of "choosing again what is good ... We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom" (205). Appealing to all humanity not to forget this human dignity, he says "No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts"

(205).

Education and training are the key challenges: "change is impossible without motivation and a process of education". Laws alone will not induce people to change. "If the laws are to bring about significant, long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond... A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment".

*Some of the measures individuals and families can take to reduce their environmental footprint include avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or carpooling, planting trees, and turning off unnecessary lights (211).*

"We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society ... for they call forth a goodness which ... inevitably tends to spread". Francis writes of the benefits to self such actions can engender. "...they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile" (212).

All educational sectors are involved, primarily "at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere" (213).

Political institutions including the Church and other social groups are encouraged to help people become aware of their role in ecology. He hopes seminaries and houses of formation will educate people in "simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment" (214). Penalties for damage to the environment are important but so too are the personal qualities of "self-control and willingness to learn from one another" (214).

St Francis of Assisi helps us to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is an essential ingredient for personal conversion along with self-reflection which leads to a desire for change. The Australian bishops have spoken of such conversion for achieving reconciliation with creation. From their 2002 statement "A new earth: the environmental challenge" the bishops suggest that "To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to

act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart” (218).

Quoting St Thérèse of Lisieux, who advocated practising the little way of love – not missing the opportunity for a kind word, a smile or any small gesture, Pope Francis writes, “An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (230).

Everything will be easier starting with a contemplative outlook that comes from faith: “as believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us with all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm” (220).

However, the “extremely complex situation” facing the planet will not be solved through a collection of individual acts but rather by a “community conversion” (219).

***May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us. In this way, we will help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied (221).***

As proposed in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating” (223), just as “happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer” (223). In this way “we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (229).

There are many ways to engage in the process of promoting the common good and defending the environment, natural or urban. In striving to protect or restore public places or buildings, relationships develop and “a new social fabric emerges”.

***In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences (232).***

The saints accompany us on this journey. Saint

Francis, cited several times, is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (10). He is the model of “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (10). The Encyclical also mentions Saint Benedict, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

After *Laudato Si'*, the regular practice of an examination of conscience, the means that the church has always recommended to orient one’s life in light of the relationship with the Lord, should include a new dimension, considering not only how one has lived communion with God, with others and with oneself, but also with all creatures and with nature.

#### For reflection

- Pope Francis speaks about “compulsive consumerism”. What does this phrase mean to you? What is the relationship between consumerism and selfishness? Between self-centeredness and greed? Between emptiness and consumption?
- Why is the family the first place where environmental concerns must be taught and lived? What is your family doing in this regard?
- What does Pope Francis mean when he says we must undergo an “ecological conversion”? In what ways should our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us?
- Pope Francis asks us to develop an attitude of “less is more”. How can you do this in your own life?
- How are the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, concrete signs for us of God’s love and care for his creation? Why does Pope Francis call the Eucharist “a sign of cosmic love”?