

**Text notes for *Laudato Si'* presentation – John XXIII Parish retreat – 03 October 2015**  
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Perhaps as a result of the incredible diplomatic and media attention, as well as that of the wider civil society, on this Encyclical Letter written by Pope Francis, the document also has been the object of a great deal of controversy – even to the point that, for this and other issues, some elected national lawmakers of the U.S.A. boycotted the Holy Father's address to the U.S. Congress during his visit there recently. Arguments against this encyclical include that the Pope should not mix science with religion and that perhaps he is a "closet Marxist". Some groups and journalists are asking whether the Pope is really Catholic! On the other hand, others who promote a more secularist approach to politics and to life in general are happy with the Pope's affirmation of "mother nature" but annoyed that he also affirms, within this document, the family, composed of mother, father, and children, as the fundamental and natural cell of society and points out that, from time immemorial, the international community has accorded to the family special rights and protection.

I cannot speak for you, but I found in this document much consolation rather than controversy. It was released during the same days that the world witnessed some unspeakable tragedies on three different continents – when terrorists took the lives of people while they went about their routine, daily activities: in Austria, when people were killed in the downtown area of Graz; when nine African-Americans who were studying the Bible were killed by a Caucasian man whose project to start a racial war was revealed in his writings; and when more than 1200 people died in Pakistan because of the terrible heat wave that evidently was caused by climate change. And now we have more tragic loss of life in the State of Oregon USA – for some unknown reason but certainly one connected to the Americans' fixation with gun violence.

In the face of such tragedies, one is tempted to ask: "Why does God allow such bad things to happen to good persons?"

This document recognizes that God wants life, not death and suffering, for the all creation, and most especially for the humans whom he has made "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5). The document received its name from the song-prayer, or canticle, of St. Francis which starts with the words, "May you be praised, O Lord. Later in the day, we will show a power-point presentation with the words of this beautiful and poetic prayer together with some scenes of the God's creation at which St. Francis marveled.

Pope Francis points out to us that this prayer "reminds 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 (#1)."<sup>1</sup> He also affirms that, "...we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters (#2)." Finally, Pope Francis laments that "This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22). (#2)

Her cry, united with that of the poor, stirs our conscience to "acknowledge our sins against creation" (#8). Taking the words of the "beloved" Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Pope reminds us: "For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity ... by causing changes in its climate ...; to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins" (#8).

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<sup>1</sup> [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) , note that all citations ending with (# \_\_\_\_ ) are taken from Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'* and indicate the relevant paragraph number within the encyclical.

Pope Francis insists that the appropriate response to such sinfulness is what St John Paul II already called a “global ecological conversion” (#5). In this, St Francis of Assisi is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. [...] He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (#10).

The Encyclical is developed around the concept of integral ecology, as a paradigm able to articulate the fundamental relationships of the person: with God, with one’s self, with other human beings, with creation. As the Pope himself explains in n. 15, this movement starts (ch. I) by listening spiritually to the results of the best scientific research on environmental matters available today, “letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows”. Science is the best tool by which we can listen to the cry of the earth.

The next step (ch. II) picks up the wealth of Judeo-Christian teaching and tradition, particularly in biblical texts and in theological reflection on them. The analysis is then directed (ch. III) towards “the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes”. The objective is to develop an integral ecological profile (ch. IV) which, in its various dimensions, includes “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”.

Insisting on transparent and inclusive dialogue, Pope Francis proposes (ch. V) a series of guidelines for the renewal of international, national and local policies, for decision-making processes in the public and business sector, for the relationship between politics and economy and that between religion and science.

Finally, based on the conviction that “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education”, chapter VI proposes “some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience”. Along this line, the Encyclical offers two prayers, the first to be shared with believers of other religions and the second among Christians. The Encyclical concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.

In the encyclical, some principal concepts are continually taken up and enriched:

- 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 value proper to each creature,
- the human meaning of ecology,
- the need for forthright and honest debate,
- the serious responsibility of international and local policy,
- the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle (16).

## **Chapter 1: Our Common Home –**

This chapter presents recent scientific findings on the environment as a way of listening to the cry of creation, “to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (#19). It thus deals with “several aspects of the present ecological crisis” (#15). It develops the following themes:

### ***Pollution, waste and the throwaway culture: Pollution affects the daily life of people with serious consequences***

- Pollution affects the daily life of people with serious

- consequences to their health, so much so that it causes millions of premature deaths (#20), while “the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (#21).
- At the root of this situation we find the “throwaway culture”, which we have to oppose by introducing models of production based on reuse and recycling and by limiting the use of non-renewable resources.
- Unfortunately, “only limited progress has been made in this regard” (#22).

Pope Francis challenges the present-day **throwaway culture** which significantly adds to pollution, gives little incentive to reuse and recycle. He raises the alarm that pollution drastically affects health and causes premature death for millions of people. He leaves no room for denial when he states that pollution makes our earth **looks like an immense pile of filth**.

#### ***Climate as a common good:***

- “Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods” (#25). Climate changes afflict entire populations and are among the causes of migration movements, but “many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms” (#26).
- At the same time, “our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded” (#25).
- To preserve the climate “represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (#25).

The Encyclical squarely acknowledges that climate change exists and has serious implications for all of humanity – but not just on the climate itself – also has social, economic, political impacts and on our ability to share the goods of this earth. The Holy Father also raises urgent concern about the inequitable impact of climate change on the poor and identifies this as a cause for mass migration in some parts of the world. He insists that our unwillingness to deal with this issue reveals our refusal to take responsibility for ourselves and others, especially the poor and marginalized.

#### ***The issue of water:***

- Entire populations, and especially children, get sick and die because of contaminated water, while aquifers continue to be polluted by discharges from factories and cities.
- The Pope clearly states that “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” (30).
- To deprive the poor of access to water means “they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity” (30).

One of the most urgent climate issues is the lack of safe water – this causes sickness and death for entire populations, but especially of children, many of whom die before they reach their fifth birthday as a result of diarrheal diseases. **The Pope states firmly that access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right.**

#### ***Loss of biodiversity:***

- Extinction of plant and animal species caused by humanity changes the ecosystem, and future consequences cannot be predicted. “Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever” (#33).

- The diverse species are not just an exploitable “resource”: they have a value in and of themselves, which is not in function of human beings. “All creatures are connected ..., for all of us, as living creatures, are dependent on one another” (#42).
- The care of richly bio-diverse areas is necessary for ensuring the equilibrium of the ecosystem and therefore of life. Often transnational economic interests obstruct this protection (#38).

We cannot accurately predict the loss of plant and animal species from the natural creation that God provided to us. Pope Francis insists that these species are not just an “exploitable resource” and that all have a responsibility to ensure the equilibrium – or balance – of diverse forms of animal and plant life within nature. He says that at times, transnational economic interests interfere with such protection. Examples – uncaring attitude of the dentist from Midwest USA who shot a lion which had been coaxed to migrate from a nature preserve in Zimbabwe – “just for the sport”; the “raping” of the Amazon forests by the lumber industries; the massive problems with animal waste disposal as a result of large-scale poultry and pig farming, instead of the small multi-use and family farming.

### ***Decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society:***

- The current model of development adversely affects the quality of life of most of humanity, showing “that the growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development” (#46).
- “Many cities are huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water” (#44), becoming unlivable from a health point of view, while contact with nature is limited, except for areas reserved for a privileged few (#45).

But the Pope does not restrict his vision to plant and other animal life alone. He shines an important light on the deterioration of the quality of human life – especially in large cities where good health, positive social environment, and contact with nature is “reserved for a privileged few”. Example: the gated communities in all parts of the world - right next to large slums or areas that have no access to modern technologies or other conveniences.

### ***Global inequality:***

- “The deterioration of the environment and of society affect the most vulnerable people on the planet” (#48), the greater part of the world’s population. In international economic/political debates, they are considered “merely as collateral damage” (#49). Instead, “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach ... so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (#49).
- The solution is not reducing the birth rate, but counteracting “an extreme and selective consumerism” of a small part of the world’s population (#50).

As in almost every chapter of the encyclical, the Pope raises the issue that environmental and social deterioration affects the poor most of all, who constitute the vast majority of society. He laments the fact that these people are often considered as “collateral damage” by both economic and political powers. He states firmly that the answer is not to ‘reduce birth rate’ but to counteract “extreme and selective consumerism”.

### ***Weak responses:***

- Aware of major differences over these issues, Pope Francis shows himself to be deeply affected by the weak responses in the face of the tragedies of many people and populations.

- Even though there is no lack of positive examples (#58), there is “complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (#59).
- Culture and adequate leadership are lacking as well as the willingness to change life style, production and consumption (#59), while urging “the establishment of a legal framework which ... can ensure the protection of ecosystems” (#53).

The Pope understands that there are different views about climate change, but he refuses to ignore the impact on so many people and populations. He commends the positive responses to date but insists that the lack of response by many constitutes **“complacency and a cheerful recklessness”**. He calls for change of life style, production, and consumption, and for a legal framework to protect ecosystems. We will see whether his words have a successful impact on the international negotiations to promote international agreements in setting limits on global temperature increases, to mitigate damage already done to the environment, and to prevent further depletion of natural resources and destruction of ecosystems.

***Questions for discussion on “Our Common Home”:***

1. **Pope Francis calls for dialogue that includes “everyone”. Who should be included in the conversation on ecology/climate change? Are they all at the table of the Climate Change negotiations? How could the Catholic Church facilitate a greater dialogue?**
2. **The climate belongs to all and is meant for all, yet a disproportionate amount of the earth’s resources is consumed by people living in the wealthy countries. What does Pope Francis propose must happen in order to address this?**

**Chapter 2: The Gospel of Creation –**

The Biblical accounts offer a comprehensive view that expresses 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).

***The light offered by faith:***

- The complexity of the ecological crisis calls for a multicultural and multidisciplinary dialogue that includes spirituality and religion.
- Faith offers “ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters” (64); responsibility for nature is part of Christian faith.
- “The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.” (#81)

The Pope professes that care for nature is an essential tenet of our faith and focuses on our long-held Catholic teaching that each and every human person was created to be a “subject” of his/her and the world’s development and not simply a passive object or victim of the destructive actions by a privileged and/or powerful few.

***The wisdom of the biblical accounts:***

- The story of creation is key for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures and how sin breaks the equilibrium of 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).
- The earth is a gift, not a possession; it was given to us to administer, not to destroy. Hence, we must respect the laws of nature, as all of creation has its own goodness.

- The psalms with their invitation to praise the Creator prayerfully remind us of this.
- A spirituality that fails to recognize Almighty God as Creator will provide no support as we end up worshipping other worldly powers, “usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot” (#75).

The Encyclical shines a spotlight on three essential and intertwined relationships for women and men: with God, with neighbour, and with the earth itself. However, even, in the Bible we read that those relationships were broken from the earliest appearance of humans on this earth – and that such a rupture is the result of sin, selfishness, and greed.

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The Bible also teaches us that the earth is a gift and not a possession – a gift entrusted to us so that we could preserve and “administer” it – not to dominate and destroy it. The Pope points out the key role of God in creation – when we limit our interest only to ourselves, we risk “trampling creation underfoot”.

#### ***The common destination of goods:***

- When we see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them.” (#87)
- “The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone”, and those who possess a part are called to administer it with respect for a “social mortgage” that applies to all forms of ownership (#93).

We cannot ignore seeing divine force, power, and beauty behind creation. No human mind, or hand, alone could have designed the whole of creation. In fact, Alonso X, of Castile, said in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, “If the Lord Almighty had consulted me before embarking on the Creations, I would have recommended something simpler.” But Professor and climate scientist, Hans Schellnhuber, who served as a consultant to the process of preparing *Laudato Si'*, responded as follows to Alonso X's claim, “Were this advice taken, we would have been deprived of the exquisite joy that lies in the admiration of the complexity surrounding us – nature itself ... the earth's climate (in keen competition with the human brain) constitutes one of the most breathtaking manifestations of this complexity (#20).

[ <http://www.news.va/en/news/climate-scientist-encyclical-laudato-si-mirrors-sc> ]

#### ***The gaze of Jesus:***

- Jesus invited his disciples “to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures” (96) and to “live in full harmony with creation” (98), without despising the body, the material or pleasant things of life.
- “The destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ” (99) and, at the end of time, all things will be consigned to the Father.
- “In this way the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end” (100).

The Pope repeats Jesus' invitation to recognize God as Father of all of creation but also points to the centrality of Christ in God's plan of salvation, since Jesus is the Beginning and the End, leading us all to fulfillment in God.

### ***Questions for Discussion on: The Gospel of Creation***

1. **What does nature teach us about the Creator? Has your own experience of the created world helped you to pray or communicate with God?**
2. **When we fail to care for creation, what impact does this have on our relationship with ourselves, others, God, and the earth?**

### **Chapter 3: Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis**

This chapter analyses the current situation “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (15), in a dialogue with philosophy and the social sciences.

#### ***Technology: creativity and power:***

- It is right to appreciate and recognize the benefits of technological progress for its contribution to sustainable development.
- But technology 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).
- Humanity needs “a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint” (#105).

The Pope appreciates the contribution of technology to integral human development – but he points out that access is unequal and those with access have “impressive dominance” over the whole of humanity”. Thus he calls for a “sound ethical system”, and a spirituality that is capable of setting limits and of promoting self-restraint.

#### ***The globalization of the technocratic paradigm:***

- The dominant technocratic mentality perceives reality as something that can be manipulated limitlessly
- Technological products are not neutral, for “they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities” (#107).
- The technocratic paradigm also dominates economy and politics. In particular, “the economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit ...].
- Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (#109). Trusting technology alone to resolve every problem means “to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system” (#111), given “that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and history” (#113).
- A “cultural revolution” (#114) is needed to recover values.

The Pope is not “against” science and technology – he states, however, that these are not enough – we also need to promote integral human development, social inclusion, and ethics (limits) - we need “a cultural revolution to recover values”.

#### ***The crisis and effects of modern anthropocentrism:***

- Putting technical reasoning above reality, ... we ... lose the possibility of understanding the place of human beings in the world and our relationship with nature, while “our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship” (#116).
- “Adequate anthropology” (#118) keeps in first place “the importance of interpersonal relations” (#119) and the protection of all human life.

- “Concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion” (#120).

The words may be complex, but the teaching is direct and simple. The Pope describes the negative impact of a culture that focuses only on human beings and their desire to “dominate” all – he emphasizes the stewardship we were given by God to take care of Creation, to hold interpersonal relationships to be of great value, and to respect and preserve human life at all stages of development, from conception to natural death.

#### ***Practical relativism:***

- A misguided anthropocentrism “which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” leads to relativism in practice.
- There is a logic in all this “whereby different attitudes can feed on one another, leading to environmental degradation and social decay” (#122).
- “When the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided” (#123).

The more we think that we, humans, are supreme, the more we cause both environmental destruction and tear apart the fabric of society. We also lose respect for law and ethics.

#### ***The need to protect employment:***

- Integral ecology “needs to take account of the value of labour” (#124).
- Everyone must be able to have work, because it is “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (#128), while “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society” (#128).
- In order that everyone can really benefit from economic freedom, “restraints occasionally have to be imposed on those possessing greater resources and financial power” (#129).

Once again, the Pope focuses on a very wide and integrated perspective of ecology – it needs to include decent work for all. This may mean that we, who already have such work, may need to sacrifice some of our comfort and wealth so that all may enjoy such access.

Can this teaching “enlighten” our almost universal resistance to paying taxes, to building solidarity with all (even those who are not “attractive” to us). Think about current tendencies to “automatize” so many functions – e.g., check-out at supermarkets, check-in at airline counters – this may bring more profit to business enterprises, but does it really contribute to integral human development and promotion of decent work for all?

#### ***New biological technologies:***

- The main reference is to genetically modified organisms (GMOs), “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” (#134), starting from the fact that “the productive land is 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.
- 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”, starting from “various lines of independent, interdisciplinary research” (#135).



The Pope recognizes the complexity of the debate around genetically modified seeds and other organisms – he does not condemn their use – but also points out that use of such technology usually remains in the hands of large business enterprises and often forces small farmers off their land and out of business. Thus he calls for a broad responsible scientific **and social** debate and consultation with the findings of **independent and interdisciplinary research**.

***Question for Discussion on: The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis***

1. How has the incorrect vision of humans' role in the world (i.e., domination rather than stewardship) contributed to such problems as pollution, climate change, access to safe, drinkable water, loss of biodiversity, and global inequality?
2. Do you think it will be possible to reverse these dangerous trends? What will it take to do so?

**Chapter 4: Integral Ecology**

The heart of the Encyclical's proposals is integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice. It "will help to provide an approach to 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 holds true in all fields: in economy and politics, in different cultures and particularly in those most threatened, and even in every moment of our daily lives. There is a relationship between environmental issues, and social and human issues, that can never be broken.

***Environmental, economic and social ecology:***

- Everything is connected. Time and space, physical, chemical and biological components of the planet, form a network that we will never fully understand.
- Fragmented and isolated knowledge must be integrated into a broader vision that considers "an interrelation between ecosystems and between the various spheres of social interaction" (#141),
- and also involves the institutional level, because "the health of a society's institutions affects the environment and the quality of human life" (#142).

The Holy Father returns to the recurrent theme of inter-connectedness of all things and people. He insists on the need for a broader vision and inter-dependency of all forms of life and includes social interaction in this phenomenon. He also calls for institutional level action in order to preserve both the environment and the quality of human life.

***Cultural ecology:***

- "Ecology, then, also **involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity**" (#143) in the broadest sense.
- It is necessary **to integrate the rights of peoples and cultures with the proactive involvement of local social actors from their own culture, with "particular concern for indigenous communities"** (#146).

The Pope includes culture, especially indigenous culture, in this vision of integral ecology and urges respect for the rights of such groups.

### *Ecology of daily life:*

- Integral ecology involves everyday life. The Encyclical gives **particular 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, transportation, etc. (#150-154).

The capacity of people to adjust and adapt even to difficult environmental conditions, such as in large cities, is recognized. But the Encyclical insists on the need to promote integral development to improve quality of life, including public space, housing, transportation, etc.

### *The principle of the common good*

- **Integral or human ecology** “is inseparable from the notion of the common good” (#158).
- In the contemporary world, where “**injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable**”,
- working for the common good means to **make choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest”**(#158).

Once again, the Holy Father emphasizes the link between human ecology and working for the common good. He is deeply concerned about the increasing numbers of people who suffer injustices, are deprived of basic human rights, and are considered expendable. He urges us to make choices in solidarity and based on a preferential option for the poorest.

### *Justice between generations*

- The **common good also regards future generations**: “We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (#159),
- without, however, forgetting **the poor of today** “whose life on this earth is brief and who **cannot keep on waiting**” (#162).

The Pope identifies the urgent need to make plans and take actions now in order to safeguard the future and quality of life of future generation but also sees equal urgency need to address the present needs of the poorest people on earth today. Again

we are reminded that this situation involves such complex and inter-related problems that it cannot be solved at the level of individuals, small groups, even by solitary countries; it needs a global consensus and commitment.

### **Questions for discussion on: Human Ecology**

1. Integral ecology links care for people and care for God's creation. How is our concern for our fellow human beings connected to our concern for the environment?
2. Pope Francis encourages us to listen *both* to the cry of the earth *and* to the cry of the poor. What happens when we are attuned only to one or the other?

### **5. Lines of Approach and Action**

In this regard, Pope Francis states, ““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 am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (#188).

#### ***Dialogue on the environment:***

- “Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan”, proposing solutions “from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries” (#164).
- The Encyclical is not afraid to judge international dynamics severely: “Recent World Summits on the environment have failed to live 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).
- Instead, as Popes have repeated several times starting with *Pacem in Terris*, what is needed 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).

Again we are reminded that this situation involves such complex and inter-related problems that it cannot be solved at the level of individuals, small groups, even by solitary countries; it needs a global consensus and commitment. And yet several World Summits on the environment have failed to reach consensus on what actions need to be taken to save our planet. Thus Pope Francis, as his recent predecessors, has noted the need to develop effective forms and instruments of global governance that can have impact on serious crises that transcend governmental abilities and that even seem too complex for the inter-governmental structures as they currently are organized and function.

#### ***Dialogue for new national and local policies***

- “Local individuals and groups ...] are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a

- spirit of creativity” (179) and a deep love for one’s own land.
- Politics and economy need to abandon the logic of short-sighted efficiency, focused on profit alone and short-term electoral success.

The Holy Father calls for more involvement of local people in discussions about how to find long-term and just solutions to the environmental crisis – he says such people have strong links and loyalty to the community, are ready to protect others, are creative, and have a deep love for their own land. He questions the tendencies of politicians and business owners to focus on profit alone or only on success at the voting polls.

***Dialogue and transparency in decision-making:***

- It is essential to **analyze and evaluate business proposals** from an environmental and social point of view so as not to harm the most disadvantaged populations (#182-188).
- It is necessary to **foster the development of honest and transparent decision making processes**, in order to “discern” which policies and business initiatives can lead to “genuine integral development” (#185).
- 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 to allow for full debate**” (#182).

Honesty and transparency is called for, especially in examining the environmental impact of projects and proposals put forward by businesses and politicians. The Pope points out clearly and courageously that proposals based in corrupt practices do not yield just agreements or results and do not allow for full debate before a project is undertaken.

***Politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment***

- “... a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth” (#189), should be developed. “The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” (#190).
- Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term” (#191). More radically, “redefining our notion of progress” (#194) is necessary, linking it to improvements in the real quality of people’s lives.
- At the same time, “economics without politics cannot be justified” (#196). Together they are called to take on a new integral approach.

The depth of the Holy Father’s thinking is most visible in these statements. He calls economic systems to greater accountability based on sound ethical principles and maintains that market forces alone are not able to adequately safeguard the environment. He emphasizes that sustainable use of natural resources is an important investment and effectively produces other positive economic impacts. He calls on all to redefine our notion of progress and to develop integral and collaborative strategies and actions.

### *Religions in dialogue with science and among themselves*

- **The empirical sciences do not completely explain life**, and technical solutions are ineffective “if we lose sight of the **great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well**”
- ... believers must live in a way consonant with their own faith and not contradict it by their actions.
- **Religions must enter into “dialogue among themselves** for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (201).
- At the same time, **dialogue among the sciences helps to overcome disciplinary isolation.**
- **Dialogue requires patience, self-discipline and generosity.**

### *Questions for discussion on: Lines of Approach and Action*

1. How can faith communities become more involved in exerting pressure on leaders and governments, at all levels, to be more responsible stewards of creation?
2. How can we help civil and political leaders make decisions and policies that will benefit the generations to come, instead of only considering the short-term?

## **6. Ecological Education and Spirituality**

The final chapter goes to the heart of ecological conversion, to which the Encyclical invites everyone. The roots of the cultural crisis are deep, and it is not easy to reshape habits and behaviour. Education and training are key. “Change is impossible without motivation and a process of education” (#15). All educational sectors should be involved, primarily “in school, in families, in the media, in catechesis” (#213).

### *Towards a new lifestyle*

- ... “all is not lost. **Human beings**, while capable of the worst, **are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning...**
- **I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours**” (#205).
- Changes in lifestyle and consumer choices can bring much “pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power” (#206).
- **“If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop an alternative lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society”** (#208)

The Holy Father strikes a hopeful chord in this last chapter of the encyclical. While more than well aware of our tendencies toward selfishness, greed, and ignoring the needs of our neighbour, Pope Francis also knows that people can choose what is good and make a new start. He believes that changes in lifestyle and consumer choices can influence decision-makers and power brokers. He urges efforts to overcome individualism in order to achieve vitally needed changes in society.

### ***Educating for the covenant between humanity and the environment***

- The importance of environmental education cannot be overstated.
- It is able to affect daily actions and habits, the reduction of water consumption, the sorting of waste and even “turning off unnecessary lights” or wearing warmer clothes so as to use less heating (211).

The Encyclical strongly encourages education on the environment, which then should aim to influence behaviour change, such as using less water, sorting waste, consuming less electricity, and relying less on artificial heating, which uses much energy and thus often consumes non-renewable natural resources.

### ***Ecological conversion***

- Faith and Christian spirituality offer profound motivations toward “a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (#216), following the example of St Francis of Assisi.
- Personal change is essential but not enough. “Social problems must be addressed by community networks” (#219).
- Ecological conversion implies gratitude and generosity and develops creativity and enthusiasm (#220).

The Pope recognizes deep links between ecological conversion and following the example of St. Francis of Assisi and other great saints in developing, refining and practicing many virtues, including expression of gratitude and generosity and developing creativity and enthusiasm. He also notes that individual social change is not enough to solve social problems, which need to be tackled by “community networks”.

### ***Fruits of ecological conversion: Joy and Peace – Civic and Political Love***

- “... happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer”.
- “An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (#230).
- With its civic and political dimensions, “love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions” of charity (#231).

Self-control and acceptance of limits often can lead to opening us up to other possibilities and joys that life can offer us. We can break the cycle and false logic of violence, exploitation, and selfishness through simple daily gestures – just think of the moral power yielded by Pope Francis – not by giving long theological treatises but by his warm smile, his literally strong embraces of the neediest people, his wishes of “buon pranzo (have a good lunch)” after the Angelus blessing on Sundays, and his humble pleas of “please don’t forget to pray for me”. So too, our love for society and commitment to the common good are expressions of the virtue of charity.

### *Sacramental signs and the celebration of rest*

- **We encounter God not only in intimacy, but also in the contemplation of creation** which bears a sign of his mystery.
- **The Sacraments show, in a privileged way, how nature was assumed by God.**
- **The Eucharist “joins heaven and earth**; it embraces and penetrates all creation... Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment.

God intimately reveals himself through nature – so too our own contemplation of nature can bring us closer to the mystery of God. Jesus created sacraments to help us advance on our spiritual pilgrimage between this life and life eternal; for the matter of the sacraments he used natural fruits of the earth and resources – water for Baptism, bread and wine for Eucharist, oil for Sacrament of the Sick. As the Source and Summit of our faith experience, the Eucharist joins heaven and earth and motivates our concern for the environment.

### *Beyond the sun*

- **In the end we find ourselves before the infinite beauty of God:** “Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all” (243).
- **Our struggles and concerns do not take away the joy of hope**, because “in the heart of this world, **the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present**” (245) and his love always compels us to search for new ways. Praise be to him.

From the beginning of Creation to its end point – union with God – we can marvel at the beauty of God which is mirrored in creation at this time – but in the next life we will see Him face to face. In our efforts to protect nature, to respect each other, and to spread out charity and justice on this earth, we are motivated by God’s beauty and selfless love. God is always present to us and helps us to find new ways of relating to Him to our neighbours, and to nature. *Laudato Si’* – may God always be praised!

### *Questions for discussion on: Ecological Education and Spirituality*

1. In the face of vast challenges posed by the effects of our sinful rupture in relationships with God, with each other, and with nature, how does our faith call us to hope?
2. How can we live out God’s vision for healed and renewed relationships with God, self, others, and creation?